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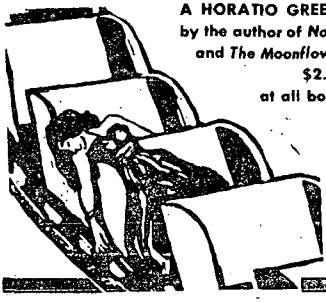

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MICHAEL GILBERT**

TITLE: ***One-Tenth Man***

TYPE: Suspense Story

PROTAGONIST: Peter Petrell

LOCALE: Andernach, Germany — on the Rhine

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Peter intended to stop over just for the night. A voice kept telling him: Go back—go back to England. But there was Lisa, beautiful Lisa; so Peter listened to his heart . . .*

IT MUST BE REMEMBERED, IN EXtenuation, that it started very late at night. Peter Petrell had stepped off the train at Andernach that evening with only one idea in his head: after the long hot day which he had spent, most of it standing, in the crowded train from Baden-Oos, he sought a good supper and an early bed.

The first he had duly obtained at the Zur Kron, where he had found a room. The second, as it happened, was denied to him.

It had really started when he fell into conversation with the insinuating Herr Wesselman and his friend Bazil. Herr Wesselman he put down as ex-army. He had the look of an Afrika-Korps man: indeed, there was something of Rommel in his face. The blunt strong features, the good-tempered eyes, the bleached and sand-blasted appearance of the skin and hair. Bazil was darker, younger, and less responsible.

It was Bazil who had suggested that they visit the Krokodil.

"Everyone in Andernach goes to the Krokodil," he observed. "Good drink, good food, pretty girls."

"Perhaps Herr Petrell is tired?"

"Certainly not," said Petrell. In fact, he had got his second wind. It was the sort of chance encounter that made a holiday abroad so pleasant.

They walked to the Krokodil through the lighted streets. It was the close of a hot summer's day. On their right winked the lights from the barges, safely moored for the night.

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Past them the Rhine swept down, smooth and full. On the far bank rose the hills crowned with vineyards. Over them the stars.

Soon they were sitting together on a red-plush settee. Wesselman gave the order.

"I wonder if Lisa will be here tonight," said Bazil.

"Who is Lisa?" asked Petrell politely. He picked up the very large goblet of white wine that had been placed on the table before him. It had been well cooled and the rim of the glass was misted. It looked like good wine.

"Lisa," said Bazil, "is — Lisa."

"She sings? Dances?"

"No, I have never heard her sing. She dances divinely. She is — oh, she is the reason you always see so many people here."

"It is said that she is Herr Bittelburg's daughter." Wesselman indicated the proprietor, who was leaning across the service counter — a big man with jowls like a bulldog, a white face, and a lightly poached eye. "Though it passes all imagination how something so gross could produce something so —"

"There," said Bazil. "You need not trouble to describe her."

The girl had come in as he was speaking. She was dressed in something very simple, and black. And her skin was white and her hair dark. And that was all that Petrell's man's eye noticed. But as soon as she came into the room she was the only person in it.

As she passed their table, Wesselman rose and said, "Lisa, you forget me?"

"But certainly not, Herr Major," the girl said politely.

"I would like you to know two friends. This is Bazil. And this, I understand, is called Peter."

Petrell, though somewhat entangled with the sofa, managed to get to his feet and sketch a bow.

He had a feeling that he was being introduced to Royalty.

"Peter," she said. "Why, that's a nice name! An Englishman. I'm crazy about Englishmen."

"Perhaps," said Wesselman, "you could join us? Later?"

"Later?" said the girl. "Perhaps." She moved on.

"Those eyes," said Wesselman. "That hair."

"What a lovely little bottom," said Bazil dreamily.

"You're a lucky man, Peter. She seems to have taken a liking for you. Why, now?"

Bazil said wisely, "It is always so. Girls, they are all the same. They crave for something different. It is the *goût de l'étranger*. American girls, I have noticed, are particularly so."

But it must have been almost an hour before Lisa returned. Though it was well after midnight, the room seemed no emptier.

She sat next to Peter, and more wine appeared. Peter decided that he had been right. It was good wine. It improved his German enormously. He found himself talking, and talking well, to Lisa.

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He raised his glass to her.

Bazil followed suit.

"To your eyes," said Bazil.

Lisa picked up her own glass, looked gravely at the cold yellow wine, and said, "They are not quite the right color."

Bazil laughed loudly.

It was at this moment that Petrell, half turning, happened to glance at Wesselman. He was startled by what he saw — without entirely understanding it. The mask of good nature had been lowered for an instant, and an emotion rode in the bleached face that was not pretty to look at. Anger, jealousy, fear — or perhaps a warning of some sort.

It was gone as quickly as it had come.

Soon after this the dancing started.

"They do such things better in Germany," thought Petrell. There was no formality and it was altogether delightful. The tables and chairs were pushed back, a space was cleared, then a little man like a gnome produced an accordion almost as large as himself and began to finger it. Later a tall thin man got up absent-mindedly and accompanied him on the violin.

It seemed natural and inevitable to Peter that he should dance with Lisa. She danced beautifully; her firm body pressed against his gave him an intoxicating sense of oneness.

"You dance very well," he said, rather breathlessly. "Are you — ?" He found himself at loss for the first time that evening.

"Am I a dance hostess?" she said with a smile. "No. I dance because I love it."

"You dance beautifully," he said. "Beautifully."

When they had danced enough, they walked out onto a balcony. They could see the town, unrolled before them, down to the river. There were fewer lights now. Just the street lights, and the string of mooring lights on the barges at the jetty.

In the dimness he could just make out the fascinating wedge of her body, fitting so snugly into the fulcrum of her hips. He had one arm round her shoulder, and turned her slowly towards him.

She said, but very quietly. "No. That is not on the bill of fare."

He slid his hand down to her waist.

"Come, little Peterkin," she said. "Dance. You dance beautifully."

"Will you walk with me afterwards to my hotel?"

"I will see you safe back to your hotel." She was laughing at him.

A blaze of light filled the balcony as the curtains swung apart. Wesselman said, rather grimly, "I thought I had lost you."

"We were admiring the night," said Lisa. "Now we will dance again."

The streets were quite empty when they walked home, and the light of a new morning was coming.

How they managed to avoid Wesselman, Peter never knew. One moment they were all dancing; the next, he and Lisa were in the cool street alone, their footsteps tapping on the cobblestones.

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He had no idea where he was going and was surprised when Lisa said, "There is the Zur Kron. It will be locked. The landlord will be very angry."

"A fiddlestick for the landlord," said Peter. "It has been the most perfect evening I have ever spent in all my life. Come here."

"You must not do that," said Lisa calmly. "Think to yourself. Think of tomorrow. You will go away tomorrow to England."

"I can wait."

"Why should you wait?"

He pulled her towards him and suddenly he could feel her hand, warm, on the cold silk of his shirt.

"Lisa," he said. "Lisa."

"*Um gotteswillen!*" said a shrill voice above them. "Please to conduct your bestialities elsewhere."

They looked up. A window had opened and a malevolent head, crowned with a tight fringe of curling papers, peered forth. "Chatter, chatter, chatter — like lecherous monkeys."

They ran.

When they got to the hotel he saw that Lisa was shaking. But it was laughter.

"Lecherous monkeys," she said. "She had the appearance of an old rock-ape herself."

Then she was gone.

When he reached his room — the keeper of the Zur Kron was more resigned than angry — he sat on his bed. He could still feel, over his heart, the warm pressure of a hand.

Then he got into bed and lay for a long time on his back, thinking, until things got blurred. And suddenly it was quite light and someone was knocking at the door, telling him it was ten o'clock.

After breakfast the proprietor came over and talked to him.

"You are going back to England today," he said. "You will want me to find you the time of the trains."

"Yes," said Petrell. "Or rather, no. I have changed my mind. I may be stopping for another two days."

"You find the town attractive?"

"Very attractive." He did not want to talk. He wanted to think.

When he had finished his breakfast he made his way slowly to the Krokodil. Mid-day was striking from the steeples of Andernach, but the restaurant had not yet come to life. It was barred, bolted, and blind.

He walked round to the back where there was a little courtyard which served the kitchen doors. This, too, was shut; but he sensed that there was life somewhere in the building.

He had little remembrance of how he spent the rest of the day. The real things were all happening inside him. He sat for a long time that afternoon on a seat by the river. The sun shone; the dimpled river ran in front of him; but he found no peace in them.

At his ear, soft but persistent, was a voice which told him to go away — to the train he had intended to catch for Cologne. *To go back to England.*

In the end, when most of the heat was out of the day, he returned to the town.

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The fat proprietor of the Krokodil was still leaning across the service counter. Presumably he had been to bed. He seemed scarcely to have moved from the evening before.

Petrell sat down. A tired waiter brought him a beer. There was no longer any magic about the place.

When he had finished his beer, Peter walked over to the proprietor, who removed his toothpick.

"When I was here last night," said Petrell — his limited German made him abrupt — "there was a young lady."

"Many young ladies."

"She sat with me and my friends."

"You have some complaint?"

"Not at all. I must see her again."

"Perhaps," said the proprietor politely, "if you knew her name — ?"

"Lisa."

"Not an uncommon name. My own daughter, for instance —"

"Yes," said Petrell eagerly. "Yes. I was told — I did not know. Could I possibly —.?"

"Of course," said the man. He called over his shoulder. "Donna! Where is Lisa?"

A dried-up old lady put her head through the hatch and muttered, "In the kitchen."

"Send her."

Presently the door opened and a girl came out. Her big arms were bare to the elbow, and she was drying her red hands on her apron.

Petrell blinked.

"Lisa, my dear. The gentleman requests a word with you."

"Surely —" Petrell began.

The girl grinned. It was a wide grin and showed large strong teeth. "I hope your head is all right today. You and your friends had much to drink last night."

Petrell stared. The deep voice was not unlike — but the face, the figure . . . It was as if some cruel fairy had waved a wand. The body, which had been firm and well-made, was now bloated. The arms — he gazed at them in fascination; they were the forearms of a boxer. The face . . . It was not Lisa; it was a caricature of Lisa, drawn by a malicious pencil.

"The young man seems tongue-tied," said the proprietor.

"A mistake," said Petrell.

The proprietor laughed.

Petrell wheeled on him. "You find something funny?" he said angrily.

"Life is often amusing."

"There's something going on here." Petrell's voice was rising. "Where is the girl who was with me last night?"

The man's face was blank again, but his eyes were ugly.

"I do not know what you are talking about."

"Certainly you know! What is the joke? What were you laughing at? You're not laughing now. You're frightened."

"Please do not raise your voice."

"Try and stop me." Petrell hit the zinc counter with his fist so that the glasses danced. "I will stay here until I get some satisfaction."

"You will leave at once."

"I will not!"

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"Then," said the proprietor, "there are those who can make you."

Petrell turned. A policeman was standing stolidly behind him.

"I must ask you," said the proprietor, "to restrain this young man. He is making a nuisance of himself. You heard him threaten me."

"It will be better," said the policeman, "if you come with me."

Petrell went.

The fury had drained out of him. He was cold now. On the way to the police station he shivered and the policeman looked at him curiously.

There was an examination room, very much like that in an English police station, and a sergeant of police, in spectacles, waiting at a table.

A small thick man in a belted raincoat was standing with his back to the fire. This man looked up as they came into the room.

"Herr Petrell," he said. "A pleasure."

"Herr Zimmer," said Petrell.

"You know this man?" said the sergeant.

Herr Zimmer walked over to the sergeant and whispered something.

"Indeed?" said the sergeant, with something like respect. "That was not understood. I do not think that Herr Bittelburg will press a charge."

"If," said Herr Zimmer, "you will perhaps release him on my undertaking, I am convinced he will behave with the utmost propriety."

Everyone seemed quite happy about this.

"Now what about a drink?" said Herr Zimmer. "Not, I should think, at the Krokodil."

When they were seated at a table in the Kolnischer Kurhaus, Petrell said, "I made a fool of myself. But thank you very much. You have popped up before, like a good fairy, and rescued me from my indiscretions."

"In 1946 — or was it 1947?"

"You are still doing the same job?"

"I am still with the Security Police," said Herr Zimmer, "It is no longer a military service, you understand."

"And what is so well-known a policeman doing in the little town of Andernach?"

Zimmer picked up his glass of wine, thought for a moment, cocked his head on one side, and said "I am prospecting for diamonds."

"Diamonds?"

"Not just any diamonds." He paused. "Some of the most famous diamonds in the world. The Hapsburg matching yellow diamonds — part of the payment made to Goering for his part in the Dolfüss coup. Lost sight of at the end of the war. Thought to be in the Eastern Zone. Now known to be back in the Western Zone. An American has offered a price for them. On one condition. That they are first transported to America. That is what I am to prevent. If I can." He paused again, then said soberly, "If the treasures of Blackbeard and Morgan were stained with the blood of hundreds, these pretty things have

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been paid for with the tears of whole nations. Stones bought at such a price must not be traded for money."

"I had no idea," said Petrell, "that diamonds could be yellow."

"Yellow is a crude description. They are of a most beautiful light golden color. Almost exactly the color of an old Erbacher Marcobrunner. Indeed, it is believed that they were smuggled across the Iron Curtain in a magnum of Marcobrunner 1947."

Something stirred in Petrell's mind — a flicker of memory, no more.

"Have you," he said cautiously, "any particular lead?"

Zimmer said, "It was suggested, but no more than suggested, that the Krokodil might be worth watching. . . . It has been pleasant meeting you after all these years. You are on your way back to London?"

"Yes," said Petrell. "I have been delayed."

After they parted Herr Zimmer spoke on the telephone. "He should be followed," he said, "but not too closely. He is no fool."

"You suspect him, then? I thought you said he was reliable."

"He is a very nice young man," said Zimmer, "and when I worked with him in Berlin after the war I found him very reliable. But no man is more reliable than his own heart."

Petrell was sitting on the edge of his bed. It was not his room at the Zur Kron. He had left that in favor of the Pension Nachtigall, a small dirty boarding house with one feature that outweighed its defects. It overlooked the rear of the Krokodil.

He had paid for the room in advance, and had not even troubled to unpack.

Outside, as dusk turned to dark and as the red neon Crocodile winked and blinked, he chased his tormented thoughts in comfortless circles.

When it happened, it happened quickly.

A shaft of light from the kitchen door of the Krokodil. The sound of steps across the courtyard. Then the courtyard door swung back, and she was there. There were two men with her, and their purpose was plain. One held her arm, the other walked to one side and behind her.

Petrell moved fast. As they turned the corner he was no more than twenty yards behind.

The next half hour was a nightmare. They did not take the direct way through the town but made a wide detour, first away from the river, then — when they were almost out of the town — back to it again. Fortunately the streets were not quite empty. At one time he got the idea that he himself was being followed, but he dismissed it as unlikely.

At last, by their redoubled precautions, he guessed that the men ahead were near their destination. They had turned from the road down a cobbled alley so steep it was almost a flight of stairs. At the bottom he could sense the presence of the river.

It was a quayside tavern, a desperate place at any hour, doubly unat-

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attractive at that hour. Petrell hesitated.

To march in and ask to speak to the girl would be courting the worst sort of trouble. On the other hand, if he went for help she might be removed and he would lose her altogether, which was unthinkable.

Was there no chance of turning the enemy's flank?

He moved along, groping in the pitch darkness, until he had reached the corner. Round the corner, down the side of the house, ran an alleyway so narrow that, as he passed, he brushed the walls on each side with his shoulders.

Under his feet the ground was soft — the filth of centuries over cobbles, he guessed. The smell was indescribable.

Then his right hand touched wood. The blank wall was broken by some sort of door. He tried it, hopefully, but it was heavy and immovable.

Nevertheless it had an iron latch, and an iron latch, even if it could not be lifted, might serve as a foothold. He stretched, felt a ledge for his fingertips, got one toe onto the latch, and pulled himself up. From there the top of the wall was in reach. A moment later he was seated astride it.

Behind and below him the alleyway was a pit of darkness. Ahead, a little light filtering from the rear windows of the tavern showed him a small courtyard and a back door. True, he could now drop down into the court; but would that achieve anything? It would not be easy to get back again. And if the house door was fastened he would be trapped.

Another idea came to him. By standing on the wall he could reach over to the sill of one of the first-story windows. If by any chance the window was open . . .

Seconds afterwards he was breathing hard, in pitch darkness, in what smelled like a woman's bedroom. He opened the door and peered out into a hall.

Below him rose the hum and clatter of the tavern.

There was one door with light shining under it. He tiptoed across to listen. There was no sound of movement. On a sudden impulse he pressed down the handle and opened the door.

"Peter!"

She was standing at the other side of the room, looking down through the curtains. As he ran towards her she came to meet him, and then was in his arms.

"Peter!"

"What are you afraid of?" he said gently.

"How did you get in? Did anyone — ?"

"Nobody saw me. And if you don't mind a jump, we can get out the same way."

"Silly Peter," she said. "Why should I want to jump out of windows with you?"

"Because you're being kept here against your will. I saw them bringing you."

"You saw them bringing me?" There was something in her voice he

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did not understand. "Did I seem so unwilling?"

"You — yes —"

"So you thought they were kidnaping me. Handsome, romantic, youthful d'Artagnan. Stupid, stupid little boy."

"I'm not sure what you're trying to talk yourself out of," said Petrell calmly. "But it's a waste of time."

She said, "I was afraid it might be. You are the sort of person who leaps before he looks, who climbs up drainpipes in the dark to rescue damsels in distress. Are you really as stupid as that? Do you live in a magazine world? Have you no idea where romance ends and reality begins?"

"Here," he said.

"Yes, here." Her hands were on him, her warm strong hands. They held his wrists.

The other man must have been in the room all the time, for Petrell heard no door opening, no footsteps, simply a swish, as of a loaded stick. His world dissolved into a hot, blinding burst of light.

His next clear recollection was a smell. The smell of paint. Of painted ironwork. And of bilges. And nausea. He had been sick. He was going to be sick again. He rolled over and closed his eyes.

Surprisingly, he must have fallen asleep.

The next time he opened his eyes he was in the same position, but something was changed. Slowly he got it. Whereas before the floor had been steady it was now, very slowly, moving. Rolling and pitching, not wildly, but steadily.

With an effort he sat up.

He was in a tiny cabin, so small that it was really more of a closet than a cabin. He was lying on the floor, which consisted of duckboards between painted iron ribs. There was no furniture; but two buckets, swinging gently on hooks, and a pile of brooms and scrubbing brushes suggested that it was some sort of glory hole.

He felt the back of his head. It was tender, but nothing was broken. Whoever had hit him knew how to use a cosh.

He took down a bucket, reversed it, and stood on it. This brought his eyes to the level of the single porthole. He was, as he had suspected, in the middle of the Rhine. At first sight one thing puzzled him. The boat, or barge, seemed to be going upstream, but if that was so the rising sun should have been ahead of him, behind the hills to the east. Unaccountably it had got into the wrong place; it was throwing long shadows from the west.

In the state he was in, this simple problem took him a long time to work out. Then, with a startled exclamation he looked down at his watch. It was still going, and registered half-past eight.

"Good God," he said. "It's evening. I've been here all day." Maybe two days? No, that was impossible. His watch would have stopped. It was Sunday evening. He had been unconscious for nearly twenty-four hours.

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Petrell sat down on the bucket and tried to think.

The people who had knocked him out could easily have dropped him into the river at Andernach. They had not done so. Therefore they were not interested in killing him. They wished merely to keep him out of the way for a few days.

He felt in his pockets. So far as he could see, nothing had been touched. His wallet and his passport were there — even the small change in his trouser pocket.

He turned his attention to the lock on the door, anticipating no great difficulty. Locks were part of his trade. He had served an apprenticeship to a lockmaking firm and the triple lever and sliding gate held no mysteries for him.

From the pocket in his waistband he took out the innocent-looking tool, which had the appearance of a lady's manicure instrument and was in fact pliers and file in one. He looked round for material and, for want of anything better, he twisted off the handle of one of the buckets. It took him an hour to cut and shape it to his needs. Then, using both hands, confidently, he opened the lock.

There was no need for caution. He was alone, in a lazarette, at the extreme end of one of the longest barges he had ever set eyes on. Dimly ahead was the tug. There seemed to be no one on the barge.

What Petrell wanted next was a decent bit of rope. In the end he had to cut one off the hatch cover. Twenty feet would do. The barge was low in the water.

As an afterthought he bundled up his wallet and passport in his big handkerchief and tied them on his head in a rough turban.

Then he fastened one end of the rope to the barge, grasped the other, and lowered himself away.

As soon as he could feel the pull of the water on his legs he let go his grip, kicked hard two or three times to get out of the wash, then settled down to a slow, steady swim.

"I think," said Herr Zimmer, "that there were misunderstandings on both sides."

"Yes," said Petrell. He was wearing an old German Army greatcoat, lent to him by the hotelkeeper in whose garden he had finally climbed ashore; and he was nearly asleep because he had waited up in front of a fire for Zimmer to arrive.

"If they had known that you were an Inspector in the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard I cannot believe that they would have selected you in the first place. Your youthful appearance deceived them — as it has deceived so many others in the past."

"Never mind my youth. What did they want?"

"First I shall have to tell you something of the people who have been playing with you —"

Petrell made a grimace of distaste which was not lost on the older man.

"They are couriers — smugglers,

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really, of the highest class. They have been entrusted with the task of taking those diamonds I spoke of to America. They will eventually receive a fifth of the price — which, when one considers what will be paid for the diamonds, is not unhandsome. We know most of their routes and many of their tricks — but not all. A month ago they had bad luck. One of their best couriers, a young man, who travels with English papers, was stopped. His passport was not in order."

"That seems clumsy."

"Not really. It was the merest slip. You know, of course, that your Foreign Office changes the paper and the watermark of its passports in small but significant particulars almost every year. This man had a passport dated 1954, but on paper which ceased to be used in 1953."

"I see," said Petrell grimly. "So all they wanted from me was a look at my passport." He took it out of his pocket and examined it. "Very neat. I wonder if anyone would ever have noticed it."

Two of the blank end pages had been removed. It had been so cleverly done and so meticulously repaired, that it was only the break in the numbering of the pages that caught the eye.

Petrell seemed to feel again the pressure of a small, strong, warm hand over his heart.

"They are, superficially, very nice people," said Zimmer thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Petrell.

"Some of the bluest blood in the land —"

"She held my wrists," said Petrell savagely. "Do you understand? She held my wrists, while her boy friend knocked me out from behind!"

"You will be better for a night's sleep," said Zimmer.

Late that night the telephone to London was busy, and in the morning Peter Petrell traveled to Hamburg with Herr Zimmer.

"How do you know that it will be today?" he asked wearily. He had slept little, and his mind was full of the wildest fancies.

"It is, of course, only a guess. But the steps they took to keep you out of the way — a little voyage up the Rhine — that argues that they were only worried about the next forty-eight hours. Since, as it falls out, the only boat to America in the next seven days leaves from Hamburg this morning you appreciate our haste."

"Yes." Petrell's heart was beating uncomfortably. "I wonder exactly how I shall be able to help you."

"I wonder that, too," said Herr Zimmer politely . . .

"Might I suggest," said the official to whom they were introduced, "that the gentleman seats himself here? He can command the only approach to the boat but remains himself unseen. There is a bell-push by his hand. So. If he should see anyone he recognizes, would he wait until they proffer their passport? — then press the bell. We will do the rest."

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They will do the rest, thought Petrell dumbly.

A sudden stir in the crowd. A flutter of stewards. Some notability arriving. Heads were turned. The crowd seemed to open and, as she stepped up to the barrier, he saw her for only the third time in his life. Beautiful, confident, endlessly desirable — and now forever out of his reach.

Being nine-tenths policeman and only one-tenth man, Peter straightway pressed the bell.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **VERONICA PARKER JOHNS**

TITLE: ***Mr. Hyde-de-Ho***

TYPE: Mystery and Suspense

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *A story with an unusual background for EQMM: hot jazz and bebop; a horn player who could blow like the angel Gabriel; and a real cool cat who was frightened to death every night — and had good reason to be!*

I ALWAYS LIKED PEG, THOUGH TIME and again I asked myself why. Maybe it was because the other girls in school were so mean to her. I even wangled her a couple of blind dates, but boys didn't like her one bit better than girls did. All my efforts in her behalf ended in people getting sore at me. They said she was a square. They were right. She had the sharpest corners in town, which was what made it seem so all-fired odd when this jazz musician apparently fell for her.

That was a long time later. In fact, it seems like only yesterday although it's at least three weeks, one of which was the fastest I ever lived through. But I did live through it, which was more than I could reasonably have expected at times.

I had not seen Peg since school. Her father manufactured something or other in the middle west. The campus wits used to say that it was money, pure, green, and unadulterated, basing their guess on the amount of that commodity Peg rejoiced in. She had it, but she wasn't free with it, seeming to fear being loved for it alone. As it was, she wasn't loved at all. I was the only one who ever bothered with her, which kept me broke most of the time because she and I, like most girls, went strictly Dutch everywhere.

After graduation we corresponded desultorily — jottings on Christmas cards, that sort of thing. I came to New York and got this perfectly wonderful job as a receptionist with a recording company that specializes in jazz and the better bop; old rockin'

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chair got square Peg. She could have led at least as dull a life if her Daddy had never manufactured a dime. Then, out of the blue last November, she called me one evening.

"Guess what?" she said, a gambit which always stumps me, especially over long distance.

"You're getting married?" I ventured the obvious, wondering if she wanted me to be in the wedding party and if I could possibly swing it.

It wasn't that. Her family had at last consented to her going to Europe. She was flying over. En route she would arrive at La Guardia next Thursday. Would I meet the plane?

I couldn't even swing that. Thursday we were taping a jam session in Baltimore. I'd probably be wrapped up in the stuff all weekend.

"Dammit!" I said, irrationally consumed by a wish to see Peg, whom I had not thought of in months.

"Darn," said Peg, who was always more circumspect. "Well, save me some time in January, when I'll be in New York for several days. I'll let you know exactly when I'm coming. Will you reserve a suite for me at a hotel?"

"Which one?"

"I don't know," she said vaguely. "Which one is the most expensive?"

Same old Peg, I thought. I mentioned the name of the most elegant hostelry which first came to mind, my enthusiasm for the reunion appreciably dampened.

"You're the only person I know in New York," Peg went on plaintively. "Somehow being alone in that city frightens me more than being alone in all of Europe."

"At your service, ma'am," I told her. "Guided tours our specialty — after business hours that is. Don't forget I'm a working girl. Good night, now. Keep the airmail post cards flying."

After we hung up I sat for a moment beside the telephone, hunched over, thinking of a way I'd been since the day I was born — a way which would probably be the death of me, even if it were only death from sheer boredom. Already I could feel the weight Peg would be in January, hanging on me now as she had hung on me all through school simply because I was too loyal, or too stubborn, to run with the pack. Lord knows how I could dig up double dates for her in New York: the hepcats among whom my work had thrown me wouldn't give her the time of day. And I couldn't afford to go Dutch with her here on my salary — not with her tastes.

And yet I knew darn well I couldn't desert her, because there would be no one else to give her even a kind word. I supposed that many persons have such entanglements in their lives — old acquaintances who should have faded off the screen years before but who persist as an after-image, and ex-friends with whom friendship never had a base except propinquity or pity, yet who cannot be erased.

Peg had no place in my current world, but I knew I would be stuck with her because she needed me and

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because nobody else wanted her. I have long since declared myself president of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Lame Ducks; devotion to it is an incurable mania with me.

An ill-tempered dog used to live down the street from my apartment. Old, ugly, untidy, it received only the scorn of all passers-by — that is, all but me. Daily I spoke to it, and reached out a tentative hand. One day it granted the favor of a reply. It bit me.

That's how I am. Ah, me!

I don't know how far Peg set back international relations, but she certainly formed a low opinion of Europe. Her post cards were a series of complaints — about the weather, the shabbiness of historical monuments, the avarice of foreigners. They culminated in one from Rome indicating her determination to see everything, like it or not. She was going out of her way to visit Spain, joining a Mediterranean cruise at Genoa.

I was green with envy, naturally, but I engaged a suite for her at the Grande and tried to whistle through the New York winter, which was at its most exasperating worst the day Peg's boat arrived. She called me at the office around noon, asking blandly why I didn't lunch with her and take the afternoon off. I told her why, in terms which were not as specific as they could have been only because the office boy was hanging around at the time and I didn't want to shock him.

"How about dinner?" I offered as an alternative.

"I'm afraid not," she said coyly. "It seems that I'm going to be very busy every evening I am here. I'm sorry, Jean."

Sorry she was? I could not have been happier.

"Oh, Peg, that's marvelous," I gushed, possibly with some lack of tact. "Have you got yourself a beau?"

"I have indeed. I'm dying to tell you all about Marvin. And I want to give you the present I bought for you. How about tea?"

Tea — sit-down tea with little cakes and sandwiches tenderly served by a solicitous waitress — was something I had not had in years. I now yearned for it, as once again I yearned for the sight of Peg now that I knew she hadn't brought me a hair shirt from Paris. I looked at what I laughingly call my agenda; cutting a corner or two I could make it.

I did, with an hour to spare during which I went home and got myself all gussied up so Peg wouldn't think — think? what am I saying? — so she wouldn't know how much I had slipped post-graduately. As I worked over my hair, which I am currently retraining practically with a whip and a chair, I indulged in a few venomous thoughts about how easy it was for Peg with all her dough to look like a fashion plate. Except, I thought bitchily, that she didn't have very much to begin with. Or, rather, she had too much. I wondered if Peg was still fat.

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She was, I noticed, as she rose to greet me in the hotel lobby. She was wearing the most swooningly beautiful dress that had Paris written all over it and she didn't do a thing for it.

After embracing her I went directly to the point and asked her about the beau.

"His name is Marvin," she informed me. "He plays the cello." I thought, Ah, that explains it; he's used to having an armful.

Appropriately, we were seated so near the string orchestra that if I'd had tissue paper and a comb I could have joined in, *if* I'd had a union card. Peg chattered on about her Marvin but I could hardly decipher a word because of the din.

The cellist in this long-haired combo was as bald as a bat. I called her attention to him, saying I hoped her's was prettier.

"Oh," says she, "he doesn't play it like that. He —" She made rapid motions as though picking invisible lint from the air.

"He —?" I duplicated the motions, incredulously. "You mean he slaps the bass? He's a jazz musician?"

She nodded. I set my teacup down because I was afraid I was going to laugh.

" 'He plays the cello,' " I quoted her prior remark. "Oh, honey, don't say that. Say he beats the dog house. Say anything, only don't talk so square."

She pursed her lips. "Marvin says I'm real cool," she announced.

Then I laughed, rudely and uncontrollably. Peg's eyes kept looking more and more like marbles until I was sure this was going to be the end of a never too robust friendship. I didn't want that to happen. Peg was going to need me. I know jazz musicians. I know the type chick they fall for for real. Peg wasn't in that league at all. She was heading straight for a letdown.

I got a grip on myself. "Where'd you meet him?" I asked, trying to look disinterestedly interested just as any girl chum should.

"He was in the ship's orchestra," she answered, and I wondered if Peg could possibly have been the only female aboard. A jazz player worth his keep, given a choice of two, would not have picked a real dog like Peg for shipboard dalliance. Unless he had heard about her bankroll, a subject about which she was not precisely reticent. But what do you say? Do you megaphone up to Cloud Seven that the guy is only after her money?

Peg squinted at her diamond and platinum wrist watch.

"Come upstairs with me while I dress for dinner, will you?" she asked. Yipes, I thought. I never knew a bass player yet who dressed for dinner. The boy must play real lousy.

I followed her to the elevator, which was packed. In the hall she started talking again, saying that Marvin had a wide circle of acquaintances playing in town and he wanted them all to meet her.

"Who are some of them?" I asked

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as she fumbled for the key to her door. "Perhaps I know them. In my work I meet a lot."

I was trying to pigeonhole Marvin by the company he kept, to discover if he really belonged or was some sitter-inner with delusions of grandeur. None of the names had registered with Peg. That wasn't surprising. You could drop Louis Armstrong's name spang into Peg's lap and she wouldn't notice it.

She got the door open and we walked through the living-room into the bedroom. On one of the twin beds lay the loot of Peg's European junket — approximately three times as much as Marco Polo brought back from any of his shopping trips.

"Now I can talk more freely," said Peg, sinking down on the other bed. "Oh, Jean, I do so adore him. He's wonderful to me. It's the most beautiful thing that ever happened in my entire life."

There were tears in her eyes, and I could have wept with her because along with her tears was some measure of the uncertainy I felt. I sat down on the bed beside her and took both her hands. "Tell me about it from the beginning," I urged. "Was it love at first sight?"

"Not exactly. He was sort of involved. All the women on the boat made a play for him — he's the best-looking thing you ever saw. And there are rules. The ship's personnel isn't supposed to hobnob with the passengers."

She freed a hand and blew her nose. "When things got started between us," she said, "when he'd leave my cabin at night, it was so cute. He'd borrow my pocket mirror, slip it outside the door, and look both ways down the passage to be sure he wouldn't be seen."

I caught my breath. This sounded like hobnobbing to the nth degree. Poor Peg.

"And the time we went ashore together," she continued, "we had to meet on a street corner like international spies. That was Barcelona, the last port except Gibraltar. There's nothing to do at night in Gibraltar."

Yes, there is, I silently contradicted. Marvin could sit and look at the rock and think of all your lovely bank accounts.

"We went to an enormous night club in Barcelona," she resumed, "where we were pretty sure not to be seen. On the way out in the cab the poor darling lost his wallet."

My ears pricked. That dodge — probably the world's oldest! But I couldn't ask her. I couldn't humiliate my friend by asking if she had picked up the tab.

I didn't know what to say. I covered my confusion by poring over the loot on the bed. "Take your pick," Peg urged.

I felt like a penny-rich kid in a candy store. The things were all beautiful, and except for one I could have made my selection blindfolded. The exception was, to put it bluntly, hideous. It was a powder box of hand-tooled leather, and it was heavily en-

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crusted with great fake jewels. Peg must have bought it on one of her worst days.

It drew my attention irresistibly, like a flaw in an otherwise perfect ensemble. Peg saw me eyeing it.

"Whoops!" She laughed gaily and plucked the horror from the coverlet. "That you can't have. It's mine."

He had given it to her. Marvin. She stroked it gently, the real gems on her fingers showing up the phonies in all their cheapness. It was, she told me, the very first present she had ever received from a man who was not a relative.

"Just like a man," she added dotingly. "The shade of powder's completely wrong. It's much too light for me, but I'm going to keep it until the day I die."

She placed the treasure in a bureau drawer which she then locked, slipping the key into her wallet, a secret smile making her almost pretty. She glanced at the diamond watch and uttered a cry of dismay. Then she stripped off the watch, her rings, a brooch, and tossed them on top of the bureau. Whatever else Marvin had done to her, I reflected, he had certainly topsyturvied her sense of values.

"Sorry, honey," she said. "I must rush to get ready. You just pick out the gift you want and I'll call you tomorrow." She tugged at the delectable Paris frock, nearly fouling its zipper in her haste to get out of it.

I didn't care if she never spoke to me again, but I had to warn her.

"Peg, dear," I began, "I want you to promise me something."

"Sure," she said absently, undoing a garter.

"I hate to seem officious, but I know more about jazz musicians than you do. Don't get me wrong — some of my best friends are. They're wonderful joes for the most part, but one of the most endearing things about them is their total inability to discriminate. I mean, if they like the way a guy plays they'll overlook the fact that maybe he steals a little or perhaps killed his grandmother.

"They're the same way about places, too. It doesn't matter how crumby a dive is if it's got a good band. Your Marvin, being fresh off the sea, may want to make a tour of the spots tonight. If I were you I'd dress simply and leave my best jewelry at home.

"He may get fairly drunk, too, because he was probably under wraps on the boat. The astronomical degree of drunkenness which a really fine musician can achieve is beyond belief. All the talent, the fire that makes them great, burns with a bright alcoholic flame. Just how good is Marvin? It isn't easy to tell with bass players, you know."

"He doesn't just play the bass," she said haughtily. "That was the only job open in the ship's orchestra — that's why he was doing it. His real instrument is some kind of horn. Here, you can judge for yourself how well he plays."

From one of her suitcases she took a

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flat square package. "This is a tape recording." She pitched it to me. "It's a jam session in London. Marvin has a wonderful solo, he says. I asked him to lend it to me, thinking your studio might want to release it. But," she sniffed, "if you have such a low opinion of Marvin perhaps you'd rather not be bothered."

"Don't be silly," I said defensively. "Any opinion I have of Marvin is necessarily based on generalities — but in a field, mind you, in which I've had a lot of experience. I think I'd be failing in my duty if I didn't give you a few hints. Such as: Don't go any place with him you don't know about."

"I don't know *any* place in New York," she pointed out.

"Well, then, find out where he's taking you and phone Grandma Jean. I'll tell you. If you get into anything that looks like trouble call me. I'll be home. Wherever you are, I'll probably know someone in the band who can rescue you."

I was trying to be flippant, but I could see that I had already been a killjoy. She was undressing more slowly now, almost reluctantly.

"You mean call you instead of the police?" she asked sarcastically.

"It might be more discreet," I replied. "Which brings me to my final point: this is an eminently respectable hotel. Whatever you do, don't ask Marvin or his pals up here for a nightcap."

"You're afraid I'll be compromised."

"I'm afraid you'll be robbed," I snapped back at her.

Her eyes flashed and I had the feeling that I had put into words a fear she had purposely kept inarticulate.

"You're talking nonsense," she protested. "If Marvin wanted to rob me he had plenty of opportunity on the boat."

"He might have foreseen a little trouble getting the swag through customs," I observed. "But I didn't mean that he personally would rob you. I just thought some of his cronies might not be so scrupulous."

"All right," she agreed. "I promise I won't ask anyone up here. Anybody but Marvin, that is," she added craftily.

That part of it was her own concern and none of mine, I thought, saying goodbye to her. I didn't honestly believe Marvin would steal from her. Why should he run the risk when she seemed to be willing to give him anything he asked for?

That first day it never occurred to me that Marvin wanted anything but to marry her money.

I stopped off at the studio on my way home to play the tape recording Peg had given me. The boss, who astonishes everyone by looking more like a college professor than a crusader for hot jazz, was still in his office striving away at something. I waved to him through the glass as I passed, then found myself a machine in a quiet corner.

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It wasn't quiet long. Those English boys, bouncing off the tape, were playing loud, but not too good. It wasn't that they were amateurs; they just simply hadn't been able to get with it that night. That happens often, even to the best — unless they have a Pied Piper to follow, someone to spark them. For what seemed interminable yards these boys were going nowhere, following no leader.

And then it began — a horn solo. A cornet, the most difficult to play. This guy — Peg's Marvin? — could. And it went on and on, improvisation upon improvisation. The sleepy band started to tingle, to back up the horn, and you felt that each guy was torn between wanting that solo to go on forever and wanting to get up there and show what he could do himself. It was one of those moments. The most.

During the second chorus my boss, Mr. Kirk, came out of his office like a shot. He stood there listening, tapping his toe, stroking his goatee, joy in his eyes. I said, "I thought so, too," and bent nearer to the loudspeaker. We didn't say anything to each other, not even when there was no more music — just the echoes and the good way it made you feel. After a while we both began talking at once.

Something he said made its own music of a sort. He said he'd give me a promotion and a raise, and Jean you're a great girl. I was still so enthralled that it was a beat or two before I realized that all this wasn't just because I had shared a delightful experience with him. He expected more of me. He expected the tape, and the artist.

"You clever girl!" he chortled. "This is a scoop. Where on earth did you get it?"

Should I tell him? Should I say I got it purely by accident from a square friend of mine named Peg who claims she met this horn player slapping the bass at sea? Or should I act enigmatic, as if I had really gone out and dug up this treasure myself.

I played it smart. I said nothing.

He was still talking: "Of course we'll have to dub in an entirely new opening, but that shouldn't be too difficult. The solo we won't touch, naturally. What's the guy's name?"

"Marvin," I said.

"First name, so we can get the contracts ready in the morning?"

I'd thought that *was* his first name, or all of it, like Liberace or Evelyn and her magic violin. Any boy friend of Peg's seemed such an implausible character that I had not even bothered to ask.

"I don't know," I admitted.

"Well, find out, girl. Don't just stand there. Surely you know where to get in touch with him?"

"Yes," I said. "I mean I will tomorrow morning. He's sort of going to be related by marriage to a girl I know."

"Well, see that you don't let him get away. He's worth a fortune."

And so he would be, if I couldn't open Peg's stupid eyes. A guy with

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the limpid craziness that shimmered from that horn could not be Mr. Right for Peg. "Marvin Wrong," I dubbed him, a sometime genius now so far down on his uppers that he was forced to pick catgut in a sea-going combo. There must be a streak of wrongness in him a mile wide.

Mr. Kirk played the tape twice more, then locked it in the safe. I could have listened to it a fourth time, and a fifth.

I looked at my watch. It was quarter past twelve. A fine friend you are, I chided myself. There's your old school chum out on the town with this crazy mixed-up character and you not at the other end of your telephone as you promised you'd be.

My apartment is within walking distance of the studio. I took a cab, feeling guilty as all getout, let myself in, and switched on the light. My parakeet, Rover, as blue as the rhapsody of the same name, flew out of his never-closed cage and perched on my shoulder.

"Any calls for me?" I asked him. It was a daily routine.

Quoth the Rover, "Nevermore."

"That's mighty Poe pickings," I responded, and Rover laughed on cue.

I went to bed then. I'd been asleep some time when the phone on my bedside table screamed at me. The clock just beyond it said almost five. Peg, I thought — good Lord, Peg is in a pickle and it will take me at least an hour to be awake enough to help her.

I raised the telephone and for the first time heard the sound that was going to become so loathsomely familiar to me — short, rapid, nervous breathing with a wheeze in it.

Then a terribly, terribly British male voice said, "This is Marvin, Jean."

"Marvin!" I gasped. "Why are you calling? Has something happened to Peg?"

"No, Jean, but something will happen to you if you try to come between Peg and me. You'll find it the better part of value to keep your nose out of this."

He stopped talking and I was treated to a few bars of that squeaky breathing before the dial tone blared at me.

"Value." He *had* said "the better part of value" — choosing the *mot juste*. He was in one heck of a big financial deal and he didn't want me to queer it for him. He was trying to scare me.

It was surprising how well he had succeeded.

I was dying to call Peg the next morning to find out where-all she'd been and why she had shot off her big mouth to Marvin about my warning. Not just in those terms, of course. Since Mr. Kirk's interest had been aroused, Marvin had become very precious to me.

Peg was a heavy sleeper who had cut more morning classes than any girl on campus. I gave her until eleven, but was then informed by

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the desk clerk at the Grande that Miss Cumberland had left orders not to be disturbed, which orders would remain in effect until she personally revoked them.

I left my name. After 1 o'clock she called me, but I was out to lunch. Aware that the next turn in our game of puss-in-the-corner was mine I did the obvious. Peg's room did not answer. I left my name again. The next move was Peg's.

She didn't make it. I neither saw nor spoke to her all that day. Mr. Kirk, without losing his professorial dignity, managed to convey the impression that he was but dying to get Marvin's name, his *full* name, on a dotted line.

I had a ticket for the ballet that evening. It was after midnight when I got home, and after four when my telephone again roused me.

Marvin breathed at me.

This time that was all.

He breathed at me for about 60 seconds.

Then he hung up.

I was a long time getting back to sleep.

The next day was even more negatively eventful — up to a point. Miss Cumberland was undisturbable in the morning, and she did not call during my lunch hour. Alexander Graham Bell might never have lived for all the comfort I was currently deriving from his invention.

By mid-afternoon Mr. Kirk was almost frantic enough to tear his goatee out by the roots. He had that or-else look, and I could not only see my salary hike evaporating but my very job teetering. That job meant a lot to me.

I figured the only thing to do was to ambush Peg. If she were still on that dress-for-dinner kick she'd have to be returning to her suite pretty soon to make it. The lobby at the Grande is vast and there are several banks of elevators. The only sensible place to wait for her would be outside her own door.

I told Mr. Kirk I had to see some people about making an appointment with Marvin and could I take the rest of the afternoon off? He practically shooed me out the door, with the tacit admonition never to darken it again save in the company of a certain horn player.

The upstairs corridors of the Grande are pretty drafty if you hang around in them for an hour or so. Elevators eternally swooping down and up can become quite nerve-wracking. Somebody's mail, clattering down a chute, can shiver your timbers. But the most shattering noise in all nature or man's improvements thereupon is the stopping of an elevator when you are expecting someone to be on it. Twenty-eight times she wasn't. Then she was.

She said, "Oh, hello Jean," and I didn't honestly think she was glad to see me; but I doggedly trailed her into the suite. I had to sit down. Funny how tired I was after standing up for only a little while. I've stood

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up practically all night listening to music. But then you usually have someone to lean on.

Peg, sure as taxes, had no intention of leaning on me. You ought to be glad, I told myself; wasn't this just how you wanted it? But I wasn't satisfied. She was overacting her lack of need of me. She was, to snitch a phrase, not exactly distraught but by no means traught.

I went straight to the point: "That recording you gave me — my boss is mad for it. He wants to release it. Can you have Marvin at the studio tomorrow morning to discuss terms?"

"I'm afraid that's out of the question," she said.

I asked, "Why?"

"Because Marvin won't permit me even to mention your name. He says you've come between us with all those doubts and suspicions you put into my head. He hates you, Jean."

"I'm sorry, Peg," I said soberly. "but don't you think you may have exaggerated my remarks to him a bit? I don't remember saying anything so libelous about him personally. I just dropped a few helpful hints about how to handle jazz musicians in general —"

"That was enough," she interrupted. "You implied that he couldn't possibly be in love with me, that he must be after something else."

Attagirl, I congratulated myself; that's playing 'em with a poker face, Jeanie. Five minutes after I'd left her that first afternoon Peg must have figured out what was really in my head.

Of course, she was hypersensitive on the subject. She was admitting that weakness right now:

"You know how I am, Jean — how I've always been about people wanting only my money. Since you made me distrust Marvin I haven't let him inside this suite, however much he begged me. Oh, believe me I've wanted to!" All her frustration was packed into the phrase. "I've let him come as far as the door with me, then I've imagined what it would be like inside — not anything he might actually do, but the way I'd watch his eyes when he looked around the room, the way I'd take inventory when he had gone. It would be degrading, for both of us."

She was crying. I felt like a monster. Why hadn't I kept my mouth shut and permitted the girl to buy one last souvenir of her trip? Marvin What's-his-name — or vice versa — might be expensive but she could have afforded him. But no — I had to sow seeds of doubt, or, rather to water those which Peg had been trying valiantly to keep from sprouting. Miss Smug, I called myself, going around opening eyes which might blissfully have remained shut.

Well, I'd mend my ways from now on. If she wanted to idolize Marvin I wouldn't draw attention to his clay feet. I wouldn't point out that he really was a rum one with a nasty habit of calling up antagonists in the middle of the night and breathing

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at them. I'd speak only good of him. I had to, if I wanted to preserve my job.

"He's a marvelous musician." I climbed onto solid ground. "Really, Peg, Mr. Kirk is crazy about his solo. Let's leave my name, leave all personalities out of it, and please get him to the studio tomorrow morning. You want to further his career, don't you?"

"Of course," she replied thoughtfully. "I don't believe I ever told him where you work. I suppose I could say I met your Mr. Kirk through somebody else."

"That's it," I said. "Why not? Try to make it by noon."

She had started to change her clothes. I stood up to leave, not wishing to press my luck any further. "I'm sorry I put a damper on your visit to New York," I said. "Nevertheless, I hope you're enjoying our fair city?"

"Immensely. Marvin's taken me everywhere."

She wasn't kidding, I realized as she rattled off the names of places they'd been. It was just about everywhere — a Baedeker for jazz fans. Martin knew his spots, not just the obvious, gaudy places, but the hideaways where the true aficionados go. Quite a couple of evenings Peg had had.

I wondered who had paid for it all. Surely not Marvin, — a floating bass player doesn't get paid that kind of dough.

I figured that Peg was footing the bill, that somewhere along the European way she had accepted the principle that the woman pays. Marvin, but for the grace of whom went I, was conducting the guided tour de luxe, and not even having to go Dutch.

That girl can read me like a book. "I'm not spending one cent on any of this," she said, "if that's what you're thinking."

I'm kind of hip to the convolutions of her mind, too. At least I think I could tell if she were deliberately lying to me. She wasn't, I'd swear.

I concluded that Marvin must have some outside source of income.

They didn't show up at the studio the next noon. I hadn't really expected them before then because Marvin had checked in with me awfully late that morning, well after five. That time he did me the honor of speaking to me as well as breathing at me.

He said, "Jean, I'm warning you. I want it back, and I intend to get it back."

Of course he meant the tape recording.

In the meantime Mr. Kirk had been stricken into a sullen silence. I suspected his intention of communicating with me in the future by means of the written word — the blunt written word on a pink slip in my pay envelope tomorrow. But the green stuff in the envelope I had to have today, for I had decided what I must do.

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I would have to track down Marvin, sniffing like a bloodhound through the lush haunts he frequented. That takes dough, even if all you drink is cokes.

It was only money, Mr. Kirk seemed to assure himself as he handed it over, well spent if it produced results. It was bound to, I said, pointing out that one could not hide a horn like Marvin's under a bushel; one of the kids around town would surely be able to locate it. I reserved for myself the depressing simile that I would be looking for a horn in a haystack, the horn that a little boy blew.

I hit the first spot at about 9, too early for it to be crowded with customers; but that suited my purpose just fine. It was perhaps the best known jazz den in town — the mecca of tourists, to coin a phrase, well-heeled tourists who like to demonstrate their in-the-knowness by setting them up for the boys in the band. I wanted to get to the boys before they were so addled by double scotches as to merely imagine they had seen horn-playing Englishmen. I wanted the facts, Ma'am, not a second-hand optical illusion.

Nobody recalled a fat girl with a guy named Marvin. So I went to the second most publicized saloon with built-in music.

I met with a rousing reception. This was family night at Rick's. One of the things I most love about musicians is their wives. I've never met a Mrs. Jazz who wasn't a real nice girl.

Not that they're all alike. Far from it. They are as varied as the melodies in their husband's repertories. Some of them are ex-canaries with a band, some are advertising executives, and some are the girls from the old home town; but uniformly they are pretty, smart, and warmly lovingkind.

The wives had made themselves comfortable at a large table to which the husbands returned between sets. They chatted amiably — about their homes, their children, their pets, their jobs, and how real gone their guys were — and I could have dallied there for hours. Nobody, however, had noticed Peg and Marvin, so I had to hie me thence.

Then I started bar-hopping, visiting the spots on Peg's recited list, asking the same question over and over. Spot checking, that's what I was doing, and to no avail. The couple had made no lasting impression.

Along about midnight I felt like sitting down and letting the world pass by me for a change. I knew the perfect place for that, the Cortlandt Plaza which on Friday and Saturday night plays host to cats of all degree.

The Plaza, a downtown hall for hire, leads a decorous life throughout most of the week as a backdrop for weddings, bar mitzvahs, and golden jubilees. It's an enormous barn of a place with huge crystal chandeliers which might actually have been created to ricochet high notes from an alto sax. Comes the weekend and all hades breaks loose. There's always jamming, and it's always jammed. You see kids who seem too young to

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be out that late, and fossilized old fans who don't appear to have the strength to bear it. It's a heck of a lot of fun.

There's a semi-secret powder room up one flight of stairs, never so crowded as the one in the basement. I think it's where the brides and bridesmaids primp before the weddings. It has floor-length mirrors and an air of excitement — as if something divine were about to happen — and I never miss paying it a visit.

Tonight I was not to be permitted to enjoy it. The echoes of feminine chatter and laughter were dispelled by someone sobbing. In the far corner of the room a girl sat, bowed over a dressing table, crying as though her heart were broken. Instinctively I walked over to her.

It was Peg. Hearing my step she lifted her head, seeing me first in the mirror. Then she turned and shouted, "You!" — as if that were the dirtiest word she knew.

I said, "What have I done now?"

I'd done nothing new, it appeared. It was simply that she had not been able to find any antidote to my poisoning her mind against Marvin. Try as hard as she could, she still couldn't let him come into her hotel suite and he was getting sore about it.

In fact, they'd had a fierce quarrel only last night. He had called her this morning to make it up, and they'd had a perfectly dandy time this evening until just a few minutes ago when he suddenly started berating her again. He'd said he was going to give back all the presents she had given him — the platinum cuff links, the solid gold cigarette case, etc., etc., — and he suggested she ought to do likewise and they'd call it quits.

"It's the only present I ever got from a man," she wailed, "and I'm not going to give it up."

I tried to pat her shoulder but she shied away from me. "Pull yourself together, girl," I said. "He'll call you again tomorrow morning to make up — you see if he doesn't. Meanwhile I suggest you go home and get a good night's sleep."

She ignored me. She took out a powder puff, but even she could see on close inspection that her face had suffered irreparable damage and could be cured only by rest.

"Honey, these things happen in a love affair," I assured her. "The course of true love, like they say. It'll come out all right."

She grabbed my hand and clung to it. "Oh, Jean," she sobbed. "it isn't just your fault that I won't let him into my room. It's just that I don't think he really loves me. You put that idea into my head and it grew and grew and he's done nothing to stop it. Even when I asked him to marry me —"

"You what?" I whispered.

"I asked him to marry me."

"And he refused?

As she nodded I felt my own head bobbing insanely in cadence, shaking Yes when I really meant No. I didn't get it. Marvin didn't want to marry her. What, then, did he want? Not

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just a girl. A guy who played the way Marvin did could have his pick of girls.

Unless he was physically unattractive, a real dog. But Peg had said he was the handsomest man in the world. Love couldn't be *that* blind.

"I think I'll take your advice and go home," Peg muttered through a handkerchief as she gave her nose one last blow.

I left the room with her, watched her descend the broad, carpeted stairs that led to the street. Then I turned and went into the hall.

One of those swaying heads beneath the crystal chandelier was Marvin's.

Someone threw an arm about me as I entered. It was Mad Dan Marlow, who plays the sweetest clarinet this side of Bechet.

"Hi, Jeanie with the light brown bustle," he shouted. Mad Dan always shouts. "You got a date, you gorgeous creature, or you got room for me?"

"I'm looking for someone. Did you see a good-looking guy with a plump girl in a red dress?"

Peg's dress was Botticelli rose; red was the most I could expect Dan to dig.

"Plenty good-looking tomcats here tonight," he asserted. "Come on over to the table. We got an Englishman just about your size."

Marvin? I wondered. It couldn't be that easy. Or could it?

Dan and I snaked our way through the maze of nearly overlapping tables which crowded about the postage-stamp dance floor. He and his friends had staked out a claim as near to the band as possible. True jazz lovers do that, sit near the stand or turn the speaker way up high so they can give with the standard joke, the complaint between cupped palms, "I can't hear you because of the noise." The band was playing *Copenhagen.*

Dan introduced me around sort of, but it wasn't any use. I couldn't catch a name. I sat down between Pete Welsh and a man I didn't know — but I knew at once I would like to know him. He had black hair and regular features and the whitest teeth — but it wasn't just his looks. It was the expression in his eyes — a sort of enthusiasm, a gusto, an infinite capacity for appreciation.

He was watching the band. I took out a cigarette and he turned to light it for me, so I got the full benefit of his eyes. They smiled at me, amused, welcoming my sharing of his joy in the music. Golly, I just don't know how to say it. He looked so *nice.* He looked like the most.

Sitting there listening with him to *Tinroof Blues* and *Sister Kate* I felt as though I knew him very well. Good music has a way of bringing people together. I clean forgot that I did not even know his name.

The set ended in a blaze of *Panama.*

"We're on, buster," Dan called to my old new friend, who followed him to the stand and picked up a horn, a horn I placed after the first three notes.

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It was Marvin.

There was no doubt about it, however much I yearned for one. For one thing he was playing the very same solo that was on the recording, and no two people in the world could play it like that.

It sounded better now, of course, with Dan backing him up and Pete Welsh preaching for all he was worth on trombone. The applause when they finished was deafening. In the brief silence that followed I asked Pete's wife, seated two away from me, about the soloist.

"Name's Duffy," she said. "Marvin Duffy. He's English. This is the first time I've heard him play. You ever hear him before?"

"Yes," I said. "Yes, I have."

"Pete thinks he's the greatest when he plays like he's playing tonight. But he's uneven, Pete says."

How uneven can you be? — one minute to blow like the angel Gabriel and the next to slap the bass to pay for your passage? No, he wasn't uneven: he must be out-and-out crooked.

"Pete says he's a dilettante," the wife quoted, pronouncing the final *e*. "He don't work hard enough because he's independently wealthy. He just flew over here for a visit."

He flew the hard way — via Genoa on a boat. I expected her to tell me next that he was the son of at least an earl. If there's one thing I can't tolerate, it's a phony.

They started to play again, but I suddenly wasn't wanting to listen any more. I took a memo pad from my handbag — a pad printed with my firm's letterhead.

"Dear Mr. Duffy," I wrote on it. "*Please*" — I underlined it three times — "come to this address before noon tomorrow. My job depends on it, but skip that. We'll meet the figure of any diskmaker in town. Let's be businesslike and leave personalities out of it. Jean."

I anchored the note beneath his half-filled whiskey glass, stood up, and muttered apologies and good night to Dotty Welsh and the others. Then I hurried home.

I didn't have the heart to joke with Rover, feeling as if I had lost a friend of long years' standing. And I kept thinking of his eyes.

It had not seemed possible that he could call and breathe at me that night. But he did — at exactly a quarter to four.

At my joint we work a six-day week, although sometimes it seems more like eight. We're not full staff on Saturday, so I couldn't lose myself in a crowd. Mr. Kirk had his aloofness control turned way up high and I got full brunt of it. He'd lost faith — as who wouldn't? Much as I hated Marvin Duffy I was mighty glad to see him walk through that portal at twenty to twelve.

He said, "Hi, gorgeous," and I realized this was the first time I'd heard his off-phone voice, which was less affected and hardly sounded British at all. He probably piled the la-

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de-da on for Peg's benefit and had not had time to shuck it when he called me during the nights.

I hustled him right into the inner office. It did my heart good to see Mr. Kirk's face light up. I left the two of them alone with their joy.

There could not have been much haggling over price. Marvin was back at my desk in two shakes, leaning over it, thanking me for having arranged the deal, which he thought we should celebrate with a cozy little lunch. I could scarcely believe my ears, or my eyes which again saw him likable and charming.

"Why did you rush off last night?" he asked. "And what did that crack in your note mean, about leaving personalities out of it? I wasn't aware that we'd had a personality clash. In fact, it was definitely my impression that we were a thing, a twosome."

I had never before fully understood the phrase, "bewitched, bothered and bewildered," but I was all three now with plenty to spare. All I could say was, "Oh, come now."

He said, "No. *You* come now. You put on the crazy hat of yours and we'll put on the feed bags. I know a place near here."

Bewitched, I stood up to obey his command. But I still had presence of mind enough to ask, "What would *she* think of our having lunch together?"

"She?" he echoed. "There ain't no she. Did you think one of those chicks at the table last night had a claim on me? Was that the trouble?"

"No," I said. "That wasn't the trouble."

"Then what was?"

"If you don't know," I began, then stopped because it had suddenly occurred to me that he might not. Peg had mentioned my name to him but that didn't mean she had furnished him with a complete dossier. She had not necessarily told him what I worked at and where. Girls, out with their ones and onlies, rarely devote much time to talking about other girls. It was just possible that he didn't know I was me.

In that event, he didn't know that I knew he was him. A twosome, he'd said? It was more like a jolly foursome, two of us meeting hatefully at night over a telephone wire, the other two now here, ostensibly friends.

"Jean," he said forcefully. There are a lot of girls named Jean, and he hadn't heard my surname last night or this morning. "Please have lunch with me. How can you expect our fine romance to get off the ground if you're so careless with it?"

"I'll get my crazy hat," I said.

Nothing much terrible could happen to me in a public restaurant at high noon. Besides, I wanted to go with him for a variety of reasons, the only one of which I freely admitted to myself was that he had me guessing.

Mr. Kirk came in, stroking his goatee — his *scape*-goatee we call it around the studio because when he is pleased he pats it and it takes a heck of a beating when he is sore.

"Ah, there, Jean," he said avun-

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cularly. "I'm glad I caught you before you left. I thought you might like to take the afternoon off."

Would I? A free Saturday afternoon is the nicest present anyone can give me because it carries the bonus of added time on Sunday. Not only would I be able to hack at my backlog of shopping but I wouldn't have to spend Sunday hanging over a washtub. I thanked that darling Mr. Kirk most fervently.

As it turned out I didn't accomplish a thing. I got fascinated with Mr. Duffy over the lunch table, where we lingered long. I just could not understand how one person could be two such different people; a split personality is all very well, but he was overdoing it.

And I kept coming back to the same question: why would such a doll as Duffy squander his time on Peg?

There wasn't the slightest aura about him of a guy hard up for dough. I can smell that sort of thing — the horn player down on his luck, putting up a brave front to conceal the fact that his trumpet's in hock. This Duffy looked like he'd always had it.

To use the odd, almost archaic term, he was obviously a gentleman. His clothes were good — new, but not too new. He spent his lunch money freely, but not with the flamboyance of one who doesn't know where his next meal is coming from. He made no bones of the fact that he wasn't working steady, but it didn't seem to worry him.

Why, then, did he go out with Peg unless he loved her? And he couldn't love her. From where I sat, across the table, I would have sworn he was a little bit — just a litle bit — in love with me.

The waiters finally manifested their annoyance at our lingering; nice and subtly they did it — by removing all the other tablecloths.

We went out into the cold, and I do mean cold. We'd been talking mainly about music and we were both slathering to hear some, but where do you go to listen to it on a Saturday afternoon?

"Once," I said through chattering teeth, "one summer, you should pardon the expression, we had a lovely jazz river boat that went all around Manhattan. The outline of the skyscrapers looked just the way the horns sounded."

"Don't daydream," he commanded. "Think of some place where we can be warm and cheerful."

I'd already thought of it, of course, but hesitated to mention it. He brought the matter out into the open:

"How about your place? I bet you have swell records."

"I have," I said. "But —"

But what? But I have to go shopping and leave you standing here?

Marvin had looked up my telephone number and had doubtlessly also noted my address. Maybe that would be the end of it, when he found out where we were going. Maybe before my eyes he'd change into Mr. Hyde — Mr. Hyde-de-Ho.

He was hailing a cab. I stepped into

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it. Quite distinctly I gave my address to the driver. Marvin never batted an eye. Oh, those eyes!

Well, so all right. Perhaps he had looked at the phone number only. I would be perfectly safe listening to records with him in my apartment. Chances were very good that he wouldn't get a squint at the phone beside my bed with the number on it. Over my dead body he would, I thought, and stopped thinking it.

If he discovered my last name, from an envelope lying about or some other way, I had protective tricks up my sleeve. I could sic' Rover on him, and I've got neighbors who complain about everything, especially music played loud. If I needed to I could scream bloody murder and they would be at my door indignantly in a flash.

I didn't need to. He got absorbed in my record collection and hardly said Boo to me. The music never sounded so good, and we were hearing the same notes of it. Talk about going together! Listening together can be just wonderful.

After a long while we noticed that we were hungry and I threw together some things in the kitchen. Naturally I didn't ask him if he had a date with Peg. It was pushing toward nine when he said that he was supposed to be playing at the Cortlandt tonight and would I go with him.

When that record stopped we went.

He played miraculously again that night. I sat entranced, feeling like a bobby soxer.

Along about the third set I got a little competition as the most-admiring. A tall, thin, blond youth came to stand in front of the band, so near he could touch the bell of Duffy's horn. He was an under-rock-looking sort of chap with adolescent pimples to which he actually wasn't entitled because he wasn't quite that young. His proximity annoyed Duffy, who glowered at him every time he removed the mouthpiece from his lips.

It was funny how I had automatically drifted into calling this side of the riven personality "Duffy." It was rather scary, too, sort of science-fictiony the way I had disembodied and isolated the Marvin half of him. So I didn't think about it. I listened to the set end in fireworks and then watched the Duffy half walk back to me as the relief band took its place.

We had a table for two adjoining the one at which the rest of his group sat with their wives and sweethearts. Mad Dan shouted over to Duffy,

"How much you paying that guy to swoon at you? He did it last night too, didn't he?"

"Yes," Duffy said disdainfully. "He's my public. He gives me the creeps."

"Treat him gentle, boy," Dan advised. "He may organize a fan club. You could use one with the record coming out."

They'd all been told about the record, about the deal with Kirk. They were enormously pleased, as they appeared to be about me — about our going together. They had

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no reason to think it otherwise than wonderful that we had found each other.

A chair was unceremoniously pushed toward our table backwards. In a trice Duffy's public was astride it, gazing at his hero in silent adoration.

"Can't you see I'm with a lady?" Duffy admonished him coldly. "I told you last night I don't want you hanging around me."

The young man looked as if he'd been slapped, but Duffy didn't let up. He had a lot more to say, and he said it stingingly. It seemed the most ungracious manner in which to receive adulation I had ever encountered, and I couldn't bear to listen. This was the Marvin streak coming out in him, and I chose instead the laughing ghosts in the Ladies' Lounge.

I started wending my way toward it through the labyrinth of tables. I had advanced only a few feet when I came face to face with Peg.

She was about five yards away but even at a distance I could see the hatred her eyes were firing at me. I waved, as one will to a friend suddenly seen in a crowd, but stopped the gesture halfway when I realized that Peg couldn't possibly think of me as a friend, as anything but a dirty name stepping out with her guy on a Saturday evening.

I tried to get to her to explain. Lord only knows what I intended to say, but I had to convince her I wasn't a beau-snatcher. I wanted to point out to her that forces beyond my control had sucked me into this thing. But at that moment the band switched from a march to a pop tune and people started squeezing onto the floor to dance. By the time I managed to swim upstream Peg had vanished.

I dallied in the lounge until I was sure Duffy's combo was on again. Then I sneaked back to the table, got my coat, and left.

Like a fool I cried myself to sleep — but not for long. The phone started ringing at three. I didn't answer it. Then it rang every quarter hour on the dot — eight rings each time, then silence. After a while it seemed to me that the calls, like recurrent pains, were coming closer together, but I checked the clock and that wasn't so; Marvin was being as accurate as the Westminster chimes.

After 5 I thought I'd die if I wasn't allowed to fall to sleep. I had not wanted to hear him breathing, but now I was willing to hear anything if only he'd go away. I was pretty groggy and made a botch of picking up the phone; it slipped from my fingers and fell to the floor where it lay rocking for a moment.

From it was emitting Marvin's solo, the one on the record. It was not being broadcast under the most felicitous conditions, I'll admit, but he was playing it very badly. The rhythm was off, the notes tended to be flat. Marvin was at his unevenest.

After a while he stopped trying and I heard the dial tone. I let the soporific hum fill the room and keep the bell from ringing as I plummeted

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into sleep. Operator clucked at me some time after the sun was up and I put the phone back in its cradle almost without waking.

He called and breathed at me again at 11 A.M. Maybe he had done that every day while I was at the studio. I had no way of knowing.

One thing I did know was that I never wanted to see him again, bonny eyes or no. As far as I was concerned he was all Peg's from now on.

I thought of calling her to announce my capitulation, but I just didn't have the nerve. I kept remembering the look in *her* eyes when I had last seen them, and I knew that I deserved every particle of their scorn. I had first befriended, then betrayed, one who was otherwise friendless, and I didn't dare stretch out my hand to her again lest it be refused.

Peg, herself, did the hand-stretching, late that afternoon. She telephoned me. Her voice was in deep mourning as she said, "Jean, I can't bear to be alone. Is there room for me in your apartment? I want to go where he can't find me. Marvin. I'm afraid of him."

The way she said it, that made two of us.

I said of course she could come, and then I started crying, thinking how long we had known each other and how close we had been at times. I'm afraid the whole conversation was pretty maudlin and I didn't find out much about what had happened until Peg arrived, bag and baggage, about an hour later.

What I found out then wasn't too coherent because Peg was rather drunk. I couldn't blame her when I learned that Marvin had been calling her the livelong day and threatening her, until she had the sense at last to tell the switchboard not to ring her.

"Then that was worse," she said. "At least when he was on the phone I knew he wasn't on his way. When it got dark I couldn't stand being alone."

"But what did he say to you?"

"He said he'd kill me." She glanced over her shoulder as if he were here with us in the flesh instead of simply in loathsome spirit. "He said he'd strangle me. Once he said he'd break my arm first, bone by bone."

"Why didn't you send for the police?" I asked.

"What could I tell them? I didn't know where they could find him. I don't even know where he lives."

"He's a hard guy to locate," I admitted ruefully. "And when you do you wish you hadn't."

She asked if I had any liquor in the house and I produced the cooking sherry. I even had a snifter myself when Peg told me what had happened the night before, after she'd seen me at the Plaza.

She had got hold of Marvin and blasted him for being with me. *Ergo*, he knew who I was, where I lived, the works. We might expect a visit from him at any moment.

I excused myself and went downstairs to talk to John, the doorman.

"My friend who is staying with me

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is hiding from an unwelcome suitor," I understated the case. "Please don't let any strange men in without questioning them. He isn't exactly strange," I added. "It's the gentleman who was here with me last evening."

John's eyebrows rose. This juicy tidbit would be all over the building by tomorrow, but I didn't care. The tenants had it coming. I'd been no fun for them at all, a girl living alone with a parakeet.

I made up the studio couch for Peg and she was asleep on it before we had stowed away half her belongings. Sound asleep. I doubt if she even heard the bell when Marvin phoned later.

"Are you there?" he asked, and I thought, You know damn well I am, as I always am, dangling at the end of this wire like a mistreated marionette.

What I said was, "Listen Marvin. Peg has gone back home to her family. I put her on a plane this evening. I want you to stop calling me."

He breathed rapidly for a moment. Then, "I'll never stop calling you, Jean," he promised.

I hung up and proceeded to enjoy a veritable Wagnerian Cycle of nightmares.

I left a note for Peg before I tiptoed out in the morning.

"Open the door to no one," it admonished. "Don't even answer the phone or you may find that it's me checking to see if you are obeying orders. Above all, *don't go out!* I'll pop in on my lunch hour to see you."

In full contrast to my unstrung weekend, things at the studio were up-beat and cosy. Mr. Kirk had lined up the personnel for Marvin's record, which was to be cut at noon on Wednesday. There was a bunch of yellow chrysanthemums on my desk which I assumed to be a token of Mr. Kirk's esteem until I saw the card which had come with them.

It was from Marvin. Across the top he had printed, *In Memoriam.* Beneath his name was written, *Nobody gets a chance to run out on me a third time.*

I tore it to bits.

When I went home things seemed better even there. A good night's sleep had done wonders for Peg. She and my bird had made friends, but when I asked if there'd been any calls for me they had conflicting tales to tell. Rover, as usual, said, "Nevermore," while Peg vowed the phone had rung its little head off at eleven but that dutifully she had ignored it. Marvin must think I kept bankers' hours on my job.

Peg seemed almost gay, as though a backward glance at her fears of yesterday had shown them in proper perspective. Even I began to minimize my own terrors. It's easier to, in daylight.

That evening, however, I was apprehensive again. Peg wasn't in the apartment when I got there. I was relieved to find a note saying that she had got a hankering for mediaeval art — a lingering virus from her European tour I presumed — and had

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gone to the Metropolitan Museum to satisfy it. The Met is a big place staffed with vigilant guards. No harm could come to her there.

Nevertheless, fifteen minutes later I was even more nervous. The Museum closes at five and is little more than thirty blocks from my place. Peg always took a taxi, even if she were only going around the corner. Traffic problem or no traffic problem, it could not possibly take her an hour to get here in a cab.

I paced the floor, a dead ringer for the irate father of a teen-ager out too late. Then Peg showed up at a quarter past six. She was puffing like a pre-Diesel, tottering beneath a load of bundles.

"The elevator isn't running," she announced. "I had to carry these up the stairs."

I helped her with them. Their destination, it appeared, was the kitchen.

"I'm cooking dinner tonight," she explained. "I think I bought everything I need."

Helping her unpack I could not believe that she had overlooked anything. There were gin and vermouth for cocktails, three kinds of wine and a bottle of cognac, a capon, and a welter of fixings. We were obviously going to have the only kind of dinner a spoiled little rich girl can cook — the final exam of the *cordon bleu* type of school, learned by rote although the graduate may not otherwise be able to boil an egg. Quite casually, as she unwrapped the sweet butter, Peg remarked that she had seen Marvin.

"Where?" I barked. "Peg, tell me where."

"Right outside the house. I bumped into him as I came in just now."

Do some people's hearts really stop when they are startled? Mine seemed to. Marvin, I reflected, had not been much impressed by my tale of Peg's departure.

"Literally bumped into him," she was saying. "One of the bundles dropped and things were rolling all over the vestibule. Marvin helped me pick them up. He offered to carry them upstairs but I didn't think you'd approve."

"You're darned right," I said loudly.

"Oh, dear," she wailed. "I can't find the truffles. The sauce will be absolutely no good without them."

Casual — like "Pass me the salt." Here we sit on the brink of a volcano. Would you like one or two lumps in your lava?

"I bet it's still in the vestibule," she murmured. "It's so small we might easily have missed it."

"I'll see," I said impulsively. I wanted a breather away from this stupid girl who could believe that the meeting with Marvin was mere coincidence. As it turned out, I wasn't being too bright myself.

The hall lights were out. I, who do not know a watt from an ohm, supposed they had to be disconnected while the elevator was being fixed. The last few days I'd had plenty reason to be sore at Mr. Alexander

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Graham Bell; Ben Franklin now joined the circle of those famous inventors I could have done without.

Lights or no lights, I thought I could make it, being familiar with the terrain. I groped my way to the top of the stairs and clutched the handrail. I was being most careful. I believe I could have managed in the pitch dark if there had not been a wire stretched across the second step. But there was, and I tripped over it.

I knew how it happened to be there. Marvin had baited a booby-trap for Peg. As well as I knew my own name I knew that as I fell. Then I blacked out . . .

When I came to I was in my apartment and I hurt everywhere. Peg was hovering over me, and John, the doorman, had brought the doctor who has an office on the ground floor.

"Someone pulled the switches in the basement, Miss," John was saying solicitously. "While I was out to supper."

"There was a wire," I said to explain my clumsiness, and the trouble I was causing them. "Stretched across the second step."

"She kept saying that while she was unconscious," Peg told the doctor. "It isn't true. When I heard her fall I went out to her. There was no wire. She's delirious."

So he had taken it away, I thought. Marvin had retrieved his darling little wire after it had accomplished its purpose. He'd been waiting in the hall as I fell. Maybe he was still there.

The doctor jabbed a needle into my arm. I kept telling Peg that Marvin had tried to kill *her* and had got me by mistake, that he had stolen her truffles so she'd have to go down for them, that he was just outside the door right now — but they all simply smiled at me tolerantly.

I don't know whether he telephoned again that night. I was out like a light — like the lights that had been out in the pitch-black hall where Marvin had been waiting.

Peg was a smug Florence Nightingale in the chair by the window when I awakened the following afternoon. As if complimenting me upon my thoroughness she enumerated my injuries. I had a fractured clavicle. Two minor, though not negligible bones in my right foot were broken. I had numerous bruises and contusions, and I wasn't feeling too well besides. I would have to stay flat on my back for at least a week, but good old Peg wasn't deserting me. She would remain and nurse me through this whole ugly mess.

I think that was the unkindest contusion of all, the prospect of spending seven days cooped up with Peg. So far as she was concerned, I'd had it. Her love affair had muddled my life and very nearly been the death of me. She refused to believe that Marvin had tried to maim her. The way she bridled at the suggestion made me suspect that she was still a little bit in love with him. I decided to show some initiative.

I said I wanted ice cream. I declared

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that ice cream is the inalienable right of every invalid and I wanted a particular kind sold only in a neighborhood store which had never been known to make delivery in under two hours. I said she positively had to go out and get it for me immediately.

"First we've got to take a little pill," she said, gliding gracefully into the Nightingale role. "The doctor said I should give you one just as soon as you woke up."

"All right," I agreed. "Bring me a glass of water."

"There's a fresh one on the table beside you."

So there was, and an assortment of medications to gratify the most avid hypochondriac. There was hardly room for my telephone, but it was there, bless it. Thank you, Mr. Alexander Graham Bell, and forgive me for all the horrid things I've said about you.

As soon as Peg had dosed me she went out to fetch the trumped-up ice cream. I promptly reached for the phone and called the police.

"I wish to report an attempted murder," I said.

The man at the desk was a receptive listener, so I told him all I knew about Marvin. I described him in detail — as how else would a woman describe a man she has looked at with love? I told him about the dimple near the right cheekbone and the tiny mole beside his left ear. I probably said a whole lot more than the policeman cared to hear in the line of duty.

I said I didn't know where he lived but I gave a list of places he frequented. Then I said that if all means failed I knew where he would definitely be on Wednesday at noon — tomorrow, wasn't that? Wasn't today Tuesday? I gave the address of the studio and then, possibly because I come of Scotch ancestry, asked him please not to arrest Marvin until after the record was made, otherwise I might lose my job.

I had stopped talking only a minute or two before Peg came back. The ice cream really tasted pretty good but I wasn't able to finish it because suddenly I became sleepy.

The ice cream had melted in its container, on the floor beside my bed, when I awoke again.

It was dark by then. The lamp on my dresser had been turned on and I could see by Big Ben that it was almost eight.

That was the only light in the quiet apartment. Nurse Peg, I surmised, had gone off duty without drumming up a relief.

Healthy little old me was hungry, but I doubted if I could make it to the kitchen. She'd be back soon, I supposed. I was wide awake now, as who wouldn't be who had slept about twenty-four hours? There was nothing to read within reach. I keep a pad and pencil for night thoughts in the drawer of my bedside table. I took it out and began to write this story.

Trying to remember everything, to set the events down in chronological order, a couple of things popped out at me, shifting from minor to major.

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Emerging as an important question was: What did Marvin want back? Not the recording, certainly. He knew where that was, at the studio, hatching a golden egg for him. Then, what else? Surely not the only gift he had made to Peg that I knew of, the powder box.

And then I began to wonder if that was it. Was there a real gem among the phonies which my unappraising eye had overlooked? Despite the vulgarity of its design, did it have an historical association which gave it value? Was it a Renaissance piece, complete with intricate mechanism like a Borgia ring?

I had to look at it. Even if it killed me I had to limp into the living room where Peg's things were. Torturously I got out of bed and hopped from crag to crag like a hungover mountain goat, lighting lamps as I went. I made it to the table on which the box was arrogantly perched. I still didn't like it.

I thanked heaven for a tiny apartment as I managed to reach the refrigerator for a bottle of milk. Getting back to bed, even with the milk bottle and the powder box, was a little easier, but then everything always is the second time.

I was pooped when I got there, though. I lay against the pillow in utter exhaustion for several minutes before I had the strength to investigate the powder box.

All the stones were fake, all right. I removed the lid to inspect its underside. No wonder Peg had said the powder was too light for her. It was absolutely white, as white as show.

I shouted, scaring the wits out of Rover who had perched upon the bottom of my bed. What, I had asked myself, is as white as snow? Why, the answer came back, *snow*. But, of course! *Snow*. The big H. Heroin. And a valuable lot of it, I judged, at today's prices as reported in the public press. No wonder Marvin seemed to have plenty of money!

Fortune hunter? Thief? Murderer? All these and more: Marvin Duffy, Boy Dope-Smuggler.

And what an ingenious scheme he had devised! All he had to do was to bat his eyes at some droopy dame on the boat and give her a present. No doubt he had done it successfully dozens of times. What customs officer would be so zealous as to snoop inside every souvenir powder box that came his way, especially when it was in the luggage of an heiress returning from a European buying spree? After she got it through for him, all Marvin had to do was to keep that date for their first evening ashore and filch it back.

No wonder he was sore at me for having made Peg suspicious. And no wonder he wanted to kill her for her stubbornness.

I thought of calling the police to add this tidbit to the case against Marvin Duffy, but I honestly didn't feel up to it. They would doubtlessly send a man to impound the evidence, and if Peg came in while the policeman was there there'd be hell to pay.

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I simply wasn't fit enough to take it. I replaced the lid and shoved the box far into the corner of my night-table drawer.

Instead, I put in a call to Peg's family. Her mother answered. I told her that her daughter had got mixed up with a heel and that she and Mr. Cumberland had better get to New York as fast as a plane could carry them. I said Peg was due for an awful shock tomorrow and they'd better be around to keep her from making an even bigger fool of herself. I could bear the full responsibility no longer. She thanked me.

I took a few swigs of the milk and tried to remember from which bottle Peg had taken the pill she had given me earlier. It must be a barbiturate, judging by the drowsiness it had induced. I could use some more shut-eye right now. I located the bottle and boldly doubled the dose. I drifted off rapidly.

My night's rest was broken twice. The first time was when Peg came home and into the bedroom, belatedly concerned about her patient. I slitted my eyes and peeked at her as she stood swaying in the Botticelli rose dress. She was plastered. Good. There was every chance that she would not notice that her precious box was missing. I snored histrionically and she went away.

Then he called and breathed. I wished he'd stop it.

Calling? No, breathing.

Naturally I awoke much earlier than Peg. I drank the remaining, slightly soured milk, and passionately longed to brush my teeth. Then I took the pad and pencil and wrote some more of this story.

Peg was up pretty early for her, at about 10:30. I heard her stirring about, then I heard her scream and she was in my room like a fury.

"It's gone!" she shouted. "My powder box. Where is it?"

She looked foolish and awry in her chartreuse nightgown, hopelessly homely as some people are hopelessly ill, and completely incapable of coping with the day I knew she had ahead of her.

"It's safe Peg," I assured her "Don't worry about it."

"But I promised to give it back," she wailed. "I found Marvin last night at Rick's. He wants the box back to have it engraved, We're going to be married."

"You're what?"

"We're engaged. I forgave him for all those things he said on Sunday. He didn't mean them. He was just upset. Oh, Jean, I love him so, even if he is a litle odd."

Odd? She could say that again. I couldn't say anything for a moment.

Then I found my voice to ask, "Are you just plain nuts?"

"Maybe," she said, and I could well believe it.

I said, "Peg, I'm not going to try to talk you out of it. Your family can attend to that. They're arriving today. I called them last night and said they'd better get here fast."

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"You *what?*" It was a shriek. "Jean, how could you? I'm not a child. You didn't have to snitch to my mother on me."

"I thought I did, Peg."

I tried to sound soothing, as if she were an hysterical child, and it seemed as if I were succeeding. She remembered her nursely duties and came over to the bedside table, fumbled with the bottles.

"A pill," she muttered. "I'm supposed to give you some pills when you wake up."

"I've been awake a long time, Peg. I don't need them."

"Yes, you do."

She shook six white pellets into the palm of her hand. The sleep ones. No, you don't, I thought; you don't put me to beddybye so you can tell your folks I was off my trolley last night and there isn't a word of truth in what I told them.

"Take them," she bullied.

"Nursie, your bedside manner stinks," I remarked, pushing her hand away. The pills fell and rolled on the floor.

She stooped to pick them up. When she stood up her face was flushed, contorted with rage, her mouth in a flaccid pout. It was a distressing sight and I averted my eyes.

She took a step forward and bent over me.

"I hate you," she said. "I've always hated you. Patronizing me all the time when you didn't have two dimes to rub together. This thing with Marvin would never have got so mixed up if you hadn't horned in. I hate you, Jean," her voice broke, "so much that I could kill you!"

I looked at her then, head on, seeing her clearly for the first time ever.

"I could kill you, Jean!" she screamed.

And she wasn't kidding.

My left hand curled into a fist and beat upon the bed beneath the covers. The bird, Rover, pecked at it then flew indignantly about the room as though I had invented a new game without briefing him on the rules.

"It was you, wasn't it, Peg?" I asked. "You fouled up the elevator and the hall lights and rigged a wire to trip me. Marvin had nothing to do with it. It wasn't him trying to kill you. It was *you* trying to kill *me*. That's true, isn't it, Peg?"

"Yes," she said defiantly. "Yes, it is."

She whipped off her nightgown and twisted the lovely chartreuse chiffon into a rope. "This time I won't fail," she said.

I tried to get out of bed, knowing that even if I did I wouldn't be able to run very fast, but she drove a knee into my chest and held me there. That didn't do my broken clavicle any good.

The twinkling parakeet lit upon the rope of chartreuse, and teetered there. She flicked him off and came closer.

I thought of something. "Wait, Peg," I said. "My phone's rung at 11

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o'clock every morning you've been here, hasn't it?"

She nodded.

"It's four minutes to 11," I said. "It's an admirer who calls. It's a running gag. He calls here on the off chance that I am home and will spend the day with him. When I don't answer he calls the studio." I drew a quick deep breath and hurried on. "He knows about my fall, knows I *am* home today. If I don't answer he'll be worried — maybe he'll even send the doorman in to look for me. You'd be caught, Peg. You'd better wait until after I speak to him."

Her eyes were furtive as she glanced at the clock. Had they always been like that?

"All right," she said. "I'll wait."

I waited too. Had I ever expected so ardently to yearn for Marvin's call, for the sound of his off-beat breathing?

He was 30 seconds late. I picked up the phone and didn't give him a chance to breathe. I said, "Marvin, listen. You'll be interested in what I have to say. I can give you the powder box."

He said, "Ohhh?" with a rising inflection. He was interested.

"But," I went on, "you will have to talk nicely to Peg, because if you don't she's going to kill me. If she kills me you'll never get it, because it's in my safe-deposit box. You know about safe-deposit boxes, don't you?"

I shifted the phone, straight-arming Peg with my good one. She wasn't too formidable an adversary now. She was overwhelmed by the miracle of Marvin's being on the phone.

"They're hard to get into," I continued. "When a person dies it takes a long time to get into them, and when you do there has to be a man from the tax office right there with you to watch you. He wouldn't let you have your lovely white powder, Marvin. The only way you can get it is to go over to the bank with me and Peg this morning.

"I'll need a wheel chair, and probably some crutches. You can find a place to rent them in the classified directory. Get here soon."

"Okay," he said. "No tricks?"

"No tricks," I lied in my teeth. "Now talk prettily to Peg and tell her not to harm me. Incidentally, there's a note with the powder explaining how I got it. Your name is mentioned."

"Will do," he said.

"For you, madame." I passed the phone over to Peg. Instantly she was blubbering like a schoolgirl.

I was rather pleased with myself, yet I knew that I was by no means out of the woods. I didn't have a safe-deposit box. Considering the valuables I possess one would seem pretentious, if not downright superfluous. There was, however, a very handsome bank on the corner of my street and Fifth Avenue. I figured that if I rolled in there in a wheel chair pushed by Peg and Marvin and made a big enough scene my immediate troubles would be over.

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Peg had hung up the phone and was darting about aimlessly. Wearing a simper and nothing else, she planned what she would wear to dazzle Marvin.

"The beige or the black?" she mused. I couldn't have cared less.

I knew that once she started primping I'd never get a whack at the bathroom, not to mention the assistance I would require of her in getting my own self dressed. So I did a slow, painful scamper out of bed.

Everything hurt far more than it had last night. Peg helped me, if ungraciously. After all, I had her at a disadvantage. If my rebellious muscles had been up to shuddering, I would have done so at the thought of how recently the shoe had been on the other foot.

Until Marvin's call the advantage had been all Peg's. And, I supposed, if she had not been precipitated into a tantrum by my removal of the powder box she would have killed me at leisure, I being semi-helpless and at her mercy while she had all those lovely white pills and the pretext of doctor's orders.

I was scarcely a mirror of fashion when I finished dressing but at least I was respectably covered. I sat in the chair by the window awaiting Marvin and listening to Peg's bustling about. So help me, she was singing — offkey and unrhythmically, but as if she didn't have a care in the world.

On the more practical side, I wished I might call Mr. Kirk but I was afraid she'd hear me. I wanted to tell him to pay off the musicians assembling for the recording because Marvin wasn't playing the horn that day. He was going to be arrested in a Fifth Avenue bank for dope smuggling, which ain't the same thing at all.

Mr. Kirk must be fuming. It was five minutes past twelve and Marvin wasn't there. Then the doorbell rang and I knew he was here, and I went all to pieces at the thought of seeing him.

Peg cried out his name in tones of joy. I heard the rumbling of the wheels of a wheel chair coming toward me, like a tumbril in Revolutionary France. Then the two of them were walking through the bedroom door.

It wasn't Marvin.

That is, I mean to say, it wasn't Duffy. It undoubtedly was the guy who had been pestering me by phone, breathing at me. I should have guessed that no one who breathed like that, so jerkily, would have the breath to blow a fine cornet. But I had long been past thinking straight.

I wasn't really hep even now. It took me several minutes to place Marvin. This was the other Marvin's adoring Public, the pimply-faced character I had seen at the Cortlandt Plaza last Saturday.

And Peg had seen me with *him!* Of course. It only shows to go you how you can jump to the wrong conclusions.

No wonder Duffy had been so huffy with his admirer. The world of

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jazz is filled with these hangers-on, these talentless pests who often go so far as to identify themselves with their idols, as nice little boys will solemnly swear they are the Lone Ranger or Davy Crockett. This cat had even claimed Duffy's first name — Marvin — and Duffy's solo on a tape recording as his own.

They had got me into the wheel chair and propped up the crutches beside me and we were off to the bank, heigh-ho. But, I asked myself — knowing full well the answer — if this here ain't Duffy, where's Duffy? He's at the studio, trying to convince a cop that he didn't attempt to murder a girl he'd never even heard of.

I had to get to him. There was a way, if only I were good enough actress. We were tumbriling along the street toward the bank. I started rummaging through my handbag. I said, quite believably I think, because actually it was true;

"I can't find the key to my safe-deposit box."

Then, with the ring of falsehood I am sure, "Oh, I remember. It's at the studio. I left it there the other day after I'd been to the bank to cut some coupons."

Careful, I ticked myself off: that is the hallmark of the inexperienced liar — to furnish more corroborative details than are absolutely necessary.

They seemed to fall for my story, although they were obviously annoyed by the delay.

"The studio's just around the corner," I told them. "We'll have to go there first."

Then I kept still. There was a little piece of paper stuck to one of the wheels of my chair and I watched it go round and round as I did something very much like praying.

We got to the studio. There didn't seem to be anybody there. I guessed where most of them were — behind that soundproof door where the recording was going on. The cops, too, must be there, keeping their eyes on Marvin as I had asked them to do. But there should have been somebody out here, a substitute receptionist sitting at my desk. I'd counted on that. Mr. Kirk was a stickler for not leaving the outer office unoccupied.

The substitute must be in the washroom. I'd have to stall. I had Marvin wheel me over to my desk and I started looking through the drawers for a key which was not there.

I wasn't selling it — I could feel it in my bones, even in the broken ones. Peg's face was becoming more and more disbelieving and impatient. She picked up the sharp spindle from the desk.

Even if I screamed they'd never hear me through the soundproof door.

Hollowly I said, "The key may be in the pocket of my smock, which would be hanging in that closet." I indicated the door leading to the sound room. "Will you wheel me over, Marvin, and open it. It's pretty heavy."

It is heavy, and Marvin was no strong man. He tugged and tugged,

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while my fingers itched to get at it. At last he managed to open it an inch or so. The heavenly sound of Duffy's horn swelled through.

"There are people in there," said Peg, and she raised the spindle. Marvin let the door swing shut again.

I suppose you never know how they function, those wonderful reserves we find in moments of great need. Somehow I managed to get to my feet — my foot, rather; as the broken one was no good to me at all. I got a welcome assist from the wheel chair, which skittered back as I stepped out of it throwing Peg off balance.

"She's tricked us Marvin! There isn't any key," Peg yelled, and Marvin started coming at me with twitching hands and a ferrety look in his eyes. I yanked at the door. It gave a cushiony sigh as it slowly opened. I literally fell into the recording room.

Duffy fluffed the high D above C.

"They're trying to kill me!" I shouted. "Get them before they get away."

The cops — there was a pair of them — were quick. I got a glimpse of them nabbing Peg and Marvin in the outer office. Then Duffy came over and helped me up and held me in his arms.

"Darling," I choked. "I'll never run out on you again. I'll never distrust you again. You see, I —"

"Later," he said. "You can tell me all about it later."

I shut my eyes and leaned against his chest.

In my head I could hear that high D just as clear as a bell.

Believe it or not, we were at the Cortlandt Plaza that night, wheel chair, crutches, and all.

Duffy never sounded so good.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **VERNE ATHANAS**

TITLE: ***A Hanging Matter***

TYPE: Western Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The old days

COMMENTS: *The stranger wasn't a likable man, but he wouldn't stand for an unfair fight — not in the high desert where there was no law to speak of. . . . A yarn with a terrific payoff.*

IN THE FIRST PLACE, BUTTON BURCH was big, which made it sort of sarcastic, you see, because we called a runty kid Button or maybe Bub. But Button Burch was over six foot and maybe two hundred pounds, which is big for a rider. Button was hell on horses.

He was mean, too. He liked to fight. And he was fighting when this stranger come up to the wagon that night. Button had the kid horse-wrangler into a mix-up — the kid only about sixteen, but tall and wiry. The rest of us knowed Button, and none of us would raise to his bait, but the kid finally lost his head when Button got to digging at him, and when the stranger rode up Button had just knocked the kid sprawling and had dropped down astraddle of him. It had been going on longer than that, of course. This was the fourth time he'd dropped the kid, but the damn fool wouldn't say *nuff*. None of us was butting in. Out there in the high desert you fought your own fights and killed your own snakes.

When this stranger rode up out of the dark, Button sat astraddle of the kid and clubbed him across the nose with one of them big fists, and something busted. The stranger stepped down off his horse and the kid bucked up under Button and made a hurt noise, but he never hollered *nuff*. So Button hauled back with one of them postmaul fists. Way he was set, he was about to drive that kid's head a foot into the ground. Only the stranger took one step forward, balanced on one foot, and kicked Button right behind the left ear. Button

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lifted about a foot clear of the ground and then dropped back colder than a bit ring in February.

The stranger looked around at us. It was something like looking at a cocked pistol, in that light. Regular long barrel of a nose slanting down and eyes gray and dull and disinterested like a couple of bullets set back in the cylinder bores.

"Didn't look like a fair fight," he said, when he saw we were waiting for his move, and his voice was something like his eyes, quiet and don't-give-a-damn.

Well, that was the truth, and we never denied it. This stranger wore two guns, and out on the high desert only two kinds wore two guns — show-offs and them that needed 'em. And anybody that cold-cocked Button Burch like that wasn't no show-off. There wasn't nothing we wanted to mention right then and he said, "Can a man raise a bait here?"

Well, there was beans and coffee and bread left, and over by the wagon the cook said, "Sure. Come and git it."

"Thanks," the stranger said, and he went and took care of his horse first. Big shiny black it was, and he just took off the bridle and hung it on the saddle horn and loosed the cinches, and we all watched him. Then he throwed a bowline in his catch rope around the critter's neck and tied him out at the end of the wagon tongue, which give the horse a thirty-foot circle to graze. Then he come back and fed his face.

The kid had got up and was around behind the wagon washing the blood off his busted face, and grunting deep in his belly like a man will when he's hurt bad and too big to cry. Button lay where he'd fell, next to the fire, and about the time the stranger finished up his beans Button rolled over and dug his elbow in the dirt and come out of it.

He was big and mean, that Button, and in the firelight, with his face dirty from where he'd hit the ground and his fist red from the kid's face, he looked like nothing you'd want to meet on a dark night. Him and a grizzly bear, they was one. Ordinary man took a boot like that, he'd carry his noggin antigodlin for a week, but Button just shook his head a time or two, and he was good as new.

He hunkered there for quite a spell, looking across the fire at the stranger, watching the stranger roll a cigarette, and you could see the mad crawling up in him.

He wallowed up on his knees and braced his hands on the ground in front of him. "Take off them guns," he said in that grumbling voice of his.

The stranger had set his plate down with his cup on it, and now he was fiddling with tying a busted wrist thong on his quirt. "I'll wear 'em," he said in that quiet and don't-give-a-damn voice, and he didn't take the trouble to look up from what he was doing.

Button come on up, big as a mountain across the fire, with his close-cut black hair growing low on his fore-

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head like the poll on a bull. "I got no gun," he said, watching the stranger's hands.

"Get one," the stranger said, finishing the quirt.

"Mind now," said Button, looking around at the rest of us, "I got no gun."

He started to come around the fire. Some of us moved back a little. Nobody said nothing. We never had no law to speak of, but we had a few general rules that nobody ever bothered to write down. A few rules you kept, to keep living.

A man fought his own fights. You didn't throw a gun on an unarmed man. If you fought it rough and tumble, you did anything you was big enough to do. So we moved back. We knowed Button Burch.

But the stranger said, looking up at Button for the first time since he kicked him cold, "I've seen your kind before. You was born big, and you've turned mean. You ain't better than the man you whip, because you don't give him no break. You won't pack a gun, and you got him on beef. You strut and you brag you can whip any man alive with your fists, but it ain't because you're a better man. You're just bigger and meaner."

Well, he's said what we all knowed, and that's the truth. Most outfits wouldn't hire Button no more account of his fighting. There's a dozen men around this high desert country that Button's marked. One of them ain't able to look out of one eye and Jimmie Stranahan ain't got no teeth in the front of his face. But Button just grinned and kept coming. He knowed that the stranger wasn't going to pull no pistol with him unarmed.

Well, the stranger never. He come up easy as a cat, three, four inches shorter and maybe fifty pounds lighter than Button, and he never took a step back. But when Button grunted and made his rush, the stranger bent over a little and let him have it right along the jaw with the butt of his quirt.

Sometimes they make a quirt butt with just a big crown knot, and sometimes they take a lump of lead, about the size of a pigeon egg, and pla't the leather around that and tapering on down. The way this one thudded, it had lead in it. It turned Button halfway around and he staggered off to one side. But him and a grizzly bear was a pair to draw to. He come back for more. And he got it.

The stranger went around him like a Piute around a scalp pole, and he turned him every way but loose. He wasn't trying to cut him up, you could see that. He was slugging with every ounce he had, but it took a lot of beating to put Button Burch down. And when the stranger finally done it, Button was more of a mess than the kid. He laid there on the ground and snored, and his face was like something wild horses had run over.

I'd always figured Button short of guts. I mean, he had the bulge on any man I ever saw in a fight, but he'd

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never carry a pistol, and I figured that was his gutless way of not squaring up the odds. But he took everything the stranger dished out, and when he went down he was beat down.

The stranger stood there a minute longer with that bloody quirt reversed in his fist, and then he throwed it down like he hated it. He was breathing heavy, and he went over and got another cup of coffee and set down. It was maybe five minutes before Button stirred. Then he got up on his hands and knees and crawled around a while, and finally he got up and staggered around the wagon without looking at any of us.

Wasn't none of us sorry for Button. We'd seen some of the men he'd whipped. But none of us patted the stranger on the back, neither. He just wasn't a likeable man. So he sipped his coffee, and we looked at the fire, and then Button said, from the wagon, "All right, then, damn you."

I've often wondered who that stranger was. I saw Wes Hardin, and Wild Bill Hickok once, and later on, Bat Masterson; but this stranger could have shaded any one of them. He dropped the cup when he turned, and he had his guns out and one shot off before that cup hit the ground. But Button was set, and he got his in first. The stranger's first shot took a collar tab off Button's shirt and the other one knocked a rock into the fire and went screaming out into the dark right past where we'd bedded the day's gather of cows.

But Button got the stranger right where his ribs hooked onto his wishbone, and the stranger set down and then fell over, and his lips pulled back off his teeth like a wolf grinning. He grinned like that and sort of whispered up at nobody, "Fair nuff." Then his eyes rolled back and he jerked once and died.

Button looked mad and scared and all beat to hell. He'd had to do it, you see, but now he'd done it he wished he hadn't, and he backed off swinging his pistol back and forth on us.

He was growling like a sick bear while he caught the stranger's horse and pulled off the rope and got up and rode out, and he never let us out from under the gun.

So we all set there and looked at one another for a while, and when we couldn't hear the stranger's horse no more we went and saddled up and done what we had to do. We went out and run down Button Burch and hung him.

We just had to do it. Button knowed better than to do what he'd done. Why, a man who'd steal a horse that way out in the high desert would do most anything.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Ralph M. Thurlow's "Blue, Blue Lagoon" is one of the twenty-two "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Eleventh Annual Contest. It is a terrifying portrait of a psychotic — a bedtime story that, we guarantee, you will never wholly blot out of your mind no matter how much you may want to . . . The author is a native of Baltimore, Maryland. When he wrote "Blue, Blue Lagoon," he was 27 and married to a student of ballet. After receiving a B.A. in English from the University of North Carolina in 1951, Mr. Thurlow moved to New York City where he took a position with a large life insurance company; but late in 1954 he gave up his job and began devoting his full time to writing. In less than a year he wrote a dozen short stories, all of which, unfortunately, remained unpublished. But Mr. Thurlow was not discouraged.

Then one day he sat down in front of his typewriter, intending to write a certain story he had been planning. Strangely, an entirely different story started coming out. The next few days were ones of intense concentration — really, as the author himself described it, of "saturation." Mr. Thurlow found that he simply could not put aside the story that was pouring out of him. The result was "Blue, Blue Lagoon," which the author believed to be his best work and which, when EQMM accepted it, proved to be his first sale.

Undoubtedly the story has a white-hot, crucible quality, and while it is certainly the story of a crime, it is also, Mr. Thurlow feels, "a compassionate study of a segment of humanity whose feet never touch the earth and whose thoughts never leave the clouds."

Yes, it is all that — and more: it is a story large with meaning, both expressed and implied, and, we think, a memorable reading experience.

BLUE, BLUE LAGOON

by RALPH M. THURLOW

WHEN I FIRST SAW THE PLACE, I fell in love with it. It didn't have the view that was advertised, just a window overlooking a yard full of garbage cans. But who looks out of a window? God, I thought it was terrific. Blue. All blue. Everything blue. Walls, floors, ceiling, furniture,

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rugs. Everything. Kitchen was blue. All blue. Bathroom was blue. Even the john seat was blue. I've never seen anything like it. I took it right away. The rent was a little high, but my family was sending me some money and I had some left over from the last job. I figured that for a place like this it was a bargain. I mean, if you find something you like, you really like, what's money?

After the first week, I started getting adjusted to the place. It was exciting. Like a whole new world. The first night I just sat there in the blue chair and looked around, until it got dark. Then I went out to grab a bite without turning on the lights. When I got back, it was the greatest feeling in the world to flip on the light switch and see everything blue again.

I must have sat up the whole night just looking. The chair I sat in was across from the fireplace, and I enjoyed the fireplace thoroughly. The bottom part must have been tile or marble though, because the shade there was slightly off. You couldn't notice it right away, but if you looked long enough and carefully enough, you couldn't miss it. That was kind of disturbing that first night. Everything else was so perfect. But I overlooked it. You have to make some allowances, and I thought that later on I could match up the shades.

I had already decided to do that with the bedspread and the chair covering I sat on and the other stuffed chair. There, you could really notice the difference in shades. Oh, I knew it wouldn't be easy, but that was just about the first thing I decided to do with the room. Match everything up.

I've been living in furnished rooms in New York for I don't know how long. And I can truthfully say I hated them all. Nothing ever went together. Colors thrown here and there, with no regard for a basic idea. Just slapped on, slapped together. I mean, they never tried to create a unity, a single thing where you could feel peaceful, at ease.

Ah, the thought of it makes me sick.

But what I'm driving at is that of all people, I should have been the one to think of this idea. I lived with it for years. Somewhere in the back of my mind I knew that this is the way it should be. A cozy perfect little place that all fitted together.

So, that first week I stuck very close to the room, getting acquainted, getting adjusted, poking around in all the hidden places you can find in a room. There are corners behind furniture some people never think of looking into. I looked into them. One corner was behind the huge secretary. It was blue and so was the back of the secretary. But I discovered that inside the secretary, when you removed the drawers, there was all streaky black. The drawers inside were natural color and the edges too, and that kind of surface is easy to paint. But quite a few of the other surfaces on the frame

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itself were this streaky kind of black. I fixed that soon enough by first washing the wood, then painting it. I got the paint from the janitor who had painted the place originally. Same color blue, of course.

It took a day to get that all straightened out, then I was free to poke into other corners. Next to the secretary there was a floor lamp. It seemed to be completely blue, but when I lifted it and looked inside the stand, there was a horrible gilt color that required more paint. I didn't actually occupy all my time just looking for spots that weren't blue. I mean, don't get that idea. I'd sit down in the blue chair and admire the place for a while, then I'd look at some one place and begin to wonder. Is that blue? Like that. And then I couldn't rest until I'd found out.

The bed was quite a problem. I didn't bother with it the first or second day. But finally I had to face it. So, about the third day, I pulled off the mattress and used what was left of the paint on the bed springs and frame. When I was finished, I sat down on the mattress. It wasn't blue. God, what a shock that was. You know, you work around and concentrate on the thing you're thinking about at the moment. I just sat there stunned for a long while wondering what to do. Common sense told me I couldn't paint the mattress. I thought of dyeing it, or maybe even buying a new one. But right then I was strapped for money, so there was nothing to do but put up with the mattress until I could figure out something.

The mattress wasn't the only problem. Little by little, other unpainted places turned up. I finally had to buy the remaining gallon of blue paint from the landlady. When I think back on it, I don't know how I got through that first week. I really don't. Paint here, paint there, paint everywhere. There were dozens of unbelievable places that could easily have ruined the whole harmonious effect.

The stuff I had brought with me when I moved in was also a headache. It was in brown suitcases and I left it all unpacked and out in the bathroom. Every time I went in there it bothered me, until the big room was done, then I hauled the suitcases out to decide what to do. To begin with, I had four suits and only one of them was blue. I gave the three that weren't blue to the Salvation Army and kept the other one. I had a dark blue sports jacket and light blue trousers, so that was all right. I kept all the blue socks and shirts and ties and threw the rest away. By sheer luck, I had a pair of blue canvas shoes with crepe soles.

I had a tennis racket with a hole in it. I painted it blue on the spot and hung it over the mantel. The other stuff, I'm trying to remember. I know I bought a blue tooth brush. And some blue towels. But what did I do about the shaving things? Probably threw them away. Yes, that's what I did. I threw them away and grew a beard. I had a beard once during the war. In a base hospital they shaved it off. It

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was rotting away, so they shaved it off. No questions. Scrape. Scrape. God, how I missed that beard.

I put everything I didn't want in the apartment in the suitcases and took them down to the basement for storage. Then I put on the blue suit and went for a walk. I had breakfast and bought a paper and sat in the restaurant reading, smoking, drinking coffee, glancing out of the window at the sunshine, the steamy window, the people bending into the wind. They look like a clenched fist. Like that. It was just a wonderful feeling that Sunday morning. What difference does a stinking restaurant make when you've got a blue room to go back to?

I must have walked for miles that day. It felt like the pavement had springs in it. I walked down to the Village and roamed around. I went by houses where I knew people, but I didn't want to see anybody, or talk to anybody, or hear anybody. You know what a feeling it is to feel clear. I mean finally clear, so you can look at houses and not give a damn where all the rooms lead to. They all lead to something. Like trails. They don't just stand there like a man in water.

I finished everything in the room by the end of the second week. The kitchen sink was a terrific mess for a while, but I kept slapping paint on until the paint stayed. I got a man to open the motor in the refrigerator and I painted as much of it as I could. That left only the mattress. I was still low on money. I hadn't been looking for a job. How could I? There wasn't any time. You have to make some sacrifices. The landlady finally made me a blue mattress cover for a couple of dollars. She didn't know what I was trying to do. She was an idiot. She kept looking at me. Looking.

You know what happened . . .

You know what happened when the lieutenant stepped out on the ramp. The ramp went screeeeech and he started to yell, "Come on, you puff." Like that. Then he was gone. Disappeared. Nowhere. The brave lieutenant, the noble lieutenant. Gone in a puff. I told them to stay back. Come back. But would they listen? No. Out on the ramp and down into the water and up on the coral and down into the water and away to the island. Crazy. Crazy stupid. The little red eyes winking. Every time they winked. Poof went the lieutenant. Red eyes and the white beach and the water, the blue water. And the thing that happened on the ramp.

What happened was that I found the blue room.

It was wonderful there. I didn't want any job. I didn't need any job. The blue room was all I needed.

I would start to go out in the morning. Then I'd look back from the doorway. Then I'd close the door and take off the blue suit and put on the blue trousers and lay around looking at all the blue or listening to the blue radio. Oh, I had a radio with me when I came. I painted it right away. You could smell the paint when the tubes got hot. But it was wonderful.

When the next check came from

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home, it was bigger than usual, because it was my birthday. They got tired of writing for me to come home, but they didn't get tired of sending money. That was okay with me. It was a thrill to sit down with that check and start to plan things for the apartment. Ashtrays, cooking utensils, a couple of dishes, some towel holders with monograms, maybe a vase or two. So I went on a shopping spree. I bought all the stuff as near to my blue as I could get. But they don't make blue coffee. Nor pots. They don't make blue coffeepots.

Then I was living. No. It was as if I was waiting. Just waiting.

One day I thought about Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*. All the essentials were there in the room, plus the little things — like ashtrays. I bought a blue vase. It was pretty. I put it in the window where it caught the light. Why not a *Blue Boy*? There wasn't a picture in the place. It was funny how it suddenly hit me. I remember when I thought of it I jumped up and did a pirouette, I was that pleased with myself. I had studied dancing once. But when I did the pirouette, my hand knocked the blue vase out of the window and it broke. It sort of put a damper on me. All of a sudden, then, I felt very lonely looking down at it. I put on the blue suit and went out to look for a *Blue Boy*. And that's funny. Because that was the day I met Theresa.

That day. That day it wasn't raining. The rain, hung there, suspended, trying to fall, but not falling. As if it didn't want to fall. You've seen rain like that. I walked in it and forgot about the vase. I kept feeling lighter and lighter. I walked over to the Metropolitan Museum. I must have remembered that the museum sells good inexpensive reproductions.

When I saw Theresa the first time, she was going up the steps. She was wearing a blue coat, the same blue as mine. My apartment. She had lovely ankles going up those steps. You ever fall in love with just a part of a woman? I mean, you don't know her, you don't even see her, maybe just a hand hanging out a bus window, careless, on a warm day. I think it happens more often than anybody knows. I've had some married friends, and you see the husband watching the wife, and you know why he married her. Maybe the way a certain blouse clings. Or maybe the way her hands bring a cup to her lips. Like that. You know?

It was that way with me and Theresa.

I meant to go right up to the information desk, but I followed her instead. Oh, I don't mean I was crude about it. I just kept her in sight. I didn't expect to meet her, but I followed her anyway. Then she disappeared into one of the rooms and when I went in, she was gone. I knew she must have gone through the other door, so I started through. But she was coming back. We bumped into each other, face to face. It was silly. I couldn't think of anything to say. So I asked her where I could get a copy of

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the *Blue Boy*. It must have sounded silly to her too, because she laughed. And I laughed. But all of a sudden we were talking like old friends and walking through the museum. She was that easy to talk to.

She was a lovely girl.

Another thing she laughed at was when I asked her if she was an Egyptian. I say things like that sometimes. Something impresses me, so I blurt it out. She looked like an Egyptian. She had a sleeping face. Like the old statues. Nofretete. Like Queen Nofretete. That sleeping-face look. But she wasn't an Egyptian. She didn't seem to know what she was. It didn't matter.

After we got the reproduction, she walked with me to Madison Avenue, and we had coffee and talked about art. She talked. I listened. She talked as if she really enjoyed talking to me. Her voice was like the rain that didn't want to fall. It just hung there in a whisper. Then we were standing on the sidewalk and I don't know how it happened, but her bus came along, and she looked at her watch, and suddenly she was running to make the bus. Then she was on the bus and going away without waving, and I was standing. There. With the *Blue Boy*. I should have taken the bus right behind hers, but I didn't. I just stood there. I stood there . . .

Like a man in water, when the ramp goes down, and there's no place else to go. You wouldn't know. Nobody would know how they shoved out crazy for the beach. I told them. They trampled me. I was in the water, the blue water. I reached for the ramp but they took the ramp back up and moved out. Where do you go when the ramp goes up? Where? I'll tell you. You go up on the coral. Blue like veins. Red like stains. Open. Then the red eyes wink in the green jungle behind the white beach. Wink. And Murray and Goldberg and Smith fall asleep. Like that. Like falling asleep all of a sudden. But the rest are still going forward. Where? Into the water, wading. Into the blue water. The warm and the safe and the endless and the lovely.

Lovely. Theresa was a lovely girl. I went back to the museum all the next week to get another *Blue Boy*. But I didn't get one. When I saw her, Theresa, I went over to her and said good evening. But she was too nice. Too friendly. Too lovely. She asked what happened to the *Blue Boy*, and when I told her it got rained on, she was very sorry and wanted to buy another to replace it. Instead I took her to dinner.

We had a wonderful time. Talking, looking at each other. She was easy to get along with. Not the way they hunch over the table and invent sad things. I relaxed completely with her. She told me all about herself. How she came from Pittsburgh. What it was like in Pittsburgh. How she studied art in New York and worked in a greeting card factory. What she wanted to do. She wanted to do free-lance illustrating for magazines. Not that it was such a big thing, but it paid well enough so she could do seri-

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ous painting. She even had a small scholarship. It wasn't easy for her. I could tell that. She said some times she wanted to give up and go back. She lived alone and some times she got lonesome. I knew how she felt. I sympathized with her. I didn't talk about myself at all. There never was anything to say. And it was too good just listening to her and being with her. They had candles on the table that night, and I thought — it took a long time coming — but first there was the blue room, and then there was Theresa.

I walked her home across the park. I didn't think she was the Village type and she didn't invite me up. Before we said good night, we made a date for the next weekend. I ran back to the blue room through the park.

I guess I should have taken her up there then. I should have told her I had this blue room and taken her there . . .

That week I got the paper every morning, looking for jobs. I didn't do anything about it. But I did clean the apartment every day. I remember I kept thinking she might drop in. But that was silly. I had only told her the street. I'd wonder what she was doing and remember how she looked and imagine how she would look in the blue room.

The next day I took her to a movie. It wasn't much of a movie, but in the exciting part she held my hand. And maybe that broke the ice, because when I took her home that night she invited me up. We had hot chocolate and listened to Chopin waltzes and looked at her paintings. I hate to say it, but I didn't like them. All weird colors, and little thin lines, and people looking like broken glass. They made me nervous. I didn't think she should paint that way. I didn't say so though. When we said good night, I believe she wanted me to kiss her. She was that close.

Theresa was a lovely girl.

She invited me for breakfast Sunday morning. And then everything was fine. But she was a little distant. We ate breakfast for a long time and read the papers, and then we went for a walk in the park. It was like being married.

On the way out I looked at her name on the mailbox, and that's when I started calling her "There." Theresa. You see. You pronounce the "h" in Theresa, and if you shorten it, you get "There." And walking in the park, she shortened my name from Charles Herender to "Here." You see. "Here." Herender. We went through the park thinking up all kinds of things you could do with it. I mean, "There, there." Or "They're Here There." Meaning us. She really laughed at the one, "Hear Here, near There, there." And I caught her up in my arms. And that was the first time I kissed her. There, not "There" in the park. And she kissed me back. So there wasn't any doubt. That sleeping face.

I did it. Put that down.

We wandered all over the place that day. The park. The museum. The

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zoo. The subways. We were even on a ferry once.

When we got back to her apartment, something happened outside the door. I don't know. With a really lovely girl, like Theresa, you don't see it coming. You don't maneuver. It just happens, I guess. I think maybe it was something about the words, "Goodnight, There." The way you say things when you're happy and tired. All of a sudden we were kissing. That sleeping face. Then still with each other, the door closed and we didn't think to turn on the light.

I remember all of it. If you can ever remember all of it. Theresa. But you don't have to know that. I remember waking up the next morning and Theresa bringing me breakfast. She stayed at breakfast as long as she could, then she went to work. Then I went back to the blue room.

We had a song for it. Because I told her about it. We talked there in the night, and I told her about the blue room. Not all about it. I wanted to save some for a surprise. I told her I was an interior decorator, and I had this blue room.

We'll build a new room
A blue room
For two room . . .

Like that. She sang it soft in the night.

But you're interested in the last time. Is that right?

That time, I called her at the office. I called her three times and she said she had classes those nights. The fourth time, she said Yes. She had classes that time too, but she said Yes.

When I sat down and thought about it, I realized that I didn't actually have anything for dinner. I had a blue frying pan, and three eggs and a carton of milk. So after I cleaned the place again, I went out and bought steaks and onions and potatoes and broccoli and salad and coffee and a whole bag of stuff. Then I just sat and waited. Thinking and listening to the radio. At the last minute while I was thinking about the mattress not being blue, I remembered the sheets. I got in the habit of not using sheets. I just slept on the mattress with the spread over me. But I wanted everything perfect for Theresa. So I ran out again and bought blue sheets. When I got back, she was inside and going up the stairs. Like the first time. First the ankles, then the blue coat. But this time I knew her. It was like coming home twice. I caught up with her at the door and carried her in. She didn't want me to put her down.

She loved the place too, and that's what makes it worse. Made it worse.

What happened when she laughed at that lonely blue frying pan, and made the eggs instead? What happened when we started playing around, and looking for the coffeepot and kissing and putting her arms around me and pressing against me and loving me and saying then get your old coffeepot because I want coffee and me running down to the basement and tearing through the

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suitcases. It was as if I was crazy.

I didn't want the coffeepot. Put that down.

What happened? What happened when I came back with the coffeepot, running up the stairs, stumbling, and running into the room and seeing Theresa with the big bag torn open and the sheet wrapped around her and her clothes hanging neat on the chair and saying, You lovely fool, I love you, and dropping the sheet and standing there in the whiteness and looking loving in the terrible whiteness of always and always and growing bigger and bigger and filling the room the way women do, and glaring out in all the blue with her arms open and her mouth open . . . *like the island, the island calling, sucking you in toward the beach until there is no place to go except to the death and the red eyes beyond the white beach where the blue water ended and the falling asleep would be.*

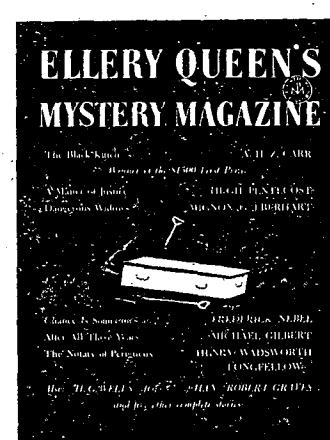
I killed her. Put that down. I must have killed her.

Did I kill her?

I painted her blue. I had to paint her blue. She had to be blue. But when I came back she wasn't the same. Put that down. I came back and saw her blue in the blue room and I sat at her feet and kissed her ankles, and it wasn't the same.

That's what you wanted to find out. Is that right? That's what you wanted to put down? I killed her. I painted her blue. She was the loveliest girl in the world, but she didn't belong there. Nobody belonged there but me.

If you are a subscriber, you've seen this special subscribers' cover and heartily approved. In fact, it was in response to your requests that we began the experiment with a design emphasizing the contents, and you have been overwhelmingly enthusiastic. If you would prefer such a cover for your future copies of EQMM just mail us the coupon on page 4 — TODAY.



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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Ryam Beck's "Tough Break" is the author's first published story — that is, in a professional sense. Mr. Beck tells us that two of his stories have appeared in high school and college literary magazines, but "Tough Break" is the first story that has earned him even a modest chunk of coin of the realm. For a new writer Mr. Beck has a surprisingly firm grip on characterization — the people in his story come alive; and the narrative flow is both driving and disciplined.

"Tough Break" is the tale of a gambler who is unlucky in love — which, according to an old saying in the profession, is not the worst thing in the world that can happen to a gambler . . . But speaking of old sayings, we could paraphrase W. S. Gilbert (of Gilbert and Sullivan fame) by calling your attention to the fact that, taking one consideration with another, a gambler's lot is not a happy one, and reminding you that there are times when the punishment should fit the crime . . .

We cannot tell you much about the author. He is 23, unmarried, was graduated from Haverford College where he was elected to Phi Beta Kappa, and his ambition is to become a serious and successful writer. As we have assured so many other beginners with talent, we of EQMM are always willing — nay, eager — to lend a helping hand.

Hallelujah, the young ones keep coming on . . .

TOUGH BREAK

by RYAM BECK

FRANK NEVITT HESITATED A MOment outside the bar. He felt certain there was no risk. But he had to find out, and this was the best place. It was too early yet for a game, so if any of the boys were in town, they'd probably be here. He'd be able to tell by talking to them, and by talking to Jack the bartender. Jack wasn't one of them, but he knew almost everything that went on.

Of course, Jack was deadpan. But Frank Nevitt was good at reading deadpans and Jack might give something away. And Gimpy would be there — he was trying to become one of them. He was getting better with his hands all the time. Frank began kneading his own hands to keep the muscles of the fingers supple. Your hands were the most important thing, but they weren't quite enough.

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Gimpy couldn't control his face. It always told what he was thinking. If they were on to Frank, Gimpy was sure to know about it, and his face would be a dead giveaway.

Frank wanted to be with the boys tonight. He was tired. But first he had to find out that everything was okay. And he needed a drink. Because he was going to see Kathy tonight too. Every time he was in town he went to see Kathy and tried to convince her to marry him. He always succeeded at night, but in the morning she became afraid. In the mornings she remembered such things as security and a home — the things he couldn't offer her. He had to be constantly on the go to make money and sometimes he was in the chips and sometimes he wasn't. It all depended on the sort of game he could set up, and on his nerves. Usually his nerves were good, but once in a while he had to pass up a big opportunity. You had to be willing to do this. You had to learn when you could take the pressure and when you couldn't. If your nerves cracked and you made just one mistake with your hands, you might be through. It wasn't that they could make trouble for you in that one town. There were always other towns. It was losing your confidence, never being sure when it would happen again. Frank's hands were important to him — as important as a piano player's or a surgeon's.

It wasn't marriage as such that Frank really cared about. It didn't make much difference to him if they were married or not. He just wanted Kathy to be with him. He didn't like the idea of other guys . . . But Kathy didn't want it that way. It had to be the real thing with her. Well, he couldn't change. He didn't know any other way of living. And he liked being on the move, he liked the excitement of a big game. Frank was pretty bigtime. In his group, nobody but Martin was a bigger operator, or a better dealer. Well, he would see Kathy tonight and try again.

He and the boys had a clever arrangement. They never worked this particular town, but whenever they felt like relaxing they would come to this bar and to the hotel in town where they could sit around and talk. They got along together, because they were of the same kind. They didn't have to act, there was no pressure. Usually they killed time by having a little game. But they played square and it was good to play in that kind of game once in a while.

Frank Nevitt went inside and up to the bar. The place seemed to be empty, but he couldn't see into the other room.

"Hello, Mr. Nevitt," Jack said. "Good to see you again."

"Good to be here again," said Frank.

"How was the trip?"

"Profitable."

"So, let's hear." Jack always said something like that even though

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none of the boys ever talked about their trips, even among themselves.

"I pay for my drinks," Frank said, grinning. He always said something like that whenever he didn't want to talk.

"What'll it be? The usual?"

"Never change," said Frank.

Jack poured out Frank's drink, then mixed it. Frank watched him and noticed that he gave him a little extra liquor. That meant that as far as Jack knew, everything was okay.

"Hiya, Frank."

Frank turned. It was Gimpy. "Hello."

"How are things?"

"Fine," said Frank.

"I'm gettin' real good," Gimpy said. He took a deck of cards out of his pocket. "Watch me. I'll deal five hands. Who do you want should get four aces?"

"Not here," said Frank.

"Yeah, I guess not."

"Any of the boys in town?"

"Sure. Say, I worked my first game a coupla weeks ago. It went off real good."

"That's fine, Gimpy. The boys getting together tonight?"

"Yeah. Around the corner at the Rollins. Room five ten."

Frank lit a cigarette. Then Jopper and Martin came out of the back room. They saw him at the bar and walked over.

"Long time no see," said Jopper.

"Gotta earn a living," said Frank. "Have a drink Set 'em up, Jack."

"Doing well, hunh?" said Jopper.

"Doing okay," Frank said.

He and Jopper looked quite a bit alike. And quite a bit like everybody else in this world. That was one advantage they had over Martin who was a huge man, over six feet tall, over two hundred pounds, and solid muscle. And then there was that scar on his neck. People would always notice Martin. In this business it was better to be the sort of person who is lost in a crowd. But Martin did all right — better than Frank. So Frank guessed that even the handicap of being stared at could be overcome.

When Jack had finished pouring the drinks, Frank picked up his glass.

"To an evening of relaxation," he said.

Everyone drank.

"Good to see you, Frank," said Martin.

"Good to see you," Frank said.

So everything was okay. He was beginning to relax.

"Well, let's have another round of drinks," Jopper said, "and then get out of here."

"I told Frank where we'd be," said Gimpy. He emphasized the "we" as if he'd been waiting all his life for the moment when he could use that word and include himself with the boys.

"I got to see someone first," said Frank, "then I'll meet you over there."

He took a taxi and headed for Kathy's place. Everything was work-

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ing out okay. Maybe this was his lucky day. Maybe things would work out with Kathy too. After all, a guy who could pull a fast one on a big shot like Martin . . . The last time he had been in town, he and the boys had had their usual friendly game. But he had been desperate for money then and didn't have a big enough stake to leave town and set up a game. It was a matter of pride with him never to borrow. That night he won over three thousand dollars and had left before the game was over. The boys had called it an amazing run of luck. But he didn't know whether they had ever caught on. Now he knew. He had got away with it. Everything was okay — the boys didn't suspect.

Standing outside the door to Kathy's apartment, Frank thought that maybe he should have telephoned first. But perhaps the element of surprise would help. He rang the doorbell.

After a few moments, Kathy opened the door. "Frank!"

"Hello, Kathy."

She looked exactly the way he wanted her to look. The slightly upturned nose, the bangs, the twinkle in her eyes that was both gay and sad.

"I didn't know you were in town."

"I've only been in about an hour."

"Well . . . Well, it's good to see you, Frank."

"Can I come in?"

"Who is it, dear?" It was a man's voice and it came from inside Kathy's apartment.

"Who's that?" Frank asked quickly.

"I wanted to write you. But I never knew where you were." She hesitated, then looked down at the floor. "I'm married, Frank."

He was stunned. He wanted to say something, but he could only manage one word. "When?"

"About two months ago."

Frank tried, but he could not get another word out.

"Come in," Kathy said. "I'd like you to meet him. Don't worry, I haven't told him a thing about you. I'll tell him you're an old hometown friend or something."

"No," Frank mumbled. "No, thanks."

And he rushed out of the apartment house, caught a taxi, and urged the driver to hurry. He didn't want to be alone now. Maybe the boys could take his mind off Kathy.

He got out of the taxi at Jack's bar. But the boys had gone. He walked around the corner to the Hotel Rollins. He went in and up to Room 510. He knocked loudly.

Gimpy opened the door. "We been waitin'."

Frank went in and Gimpy closed the door. Martin and Jopper were there, and so was Henderson.

"Well, now we have enough for a little game," Martin said.

"Yeah, let's play," said Frank.

Martin took a deck of cards out of his pocket. "Do you mind playing with this deck, Frank?"

"Makes no difference to me."

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"Don't you remember this deck?" Martin asked.

Suddenly Frank Nevitt was very tired.

"This is the same deck we used the last time you were in town," Martin said. "You remember what a run of luck you had with it. I've been saving it, Frank. I thought you'd want it for a souvenir."

Henderson started to say something, but Martin motioned him to shut up.

Then Martin said, "I've just been telling the boys how you marked this deck. That was clever, Frank. I guess you figured we'd never notice anything so simple. But I noticed it, Frank, and I've been waiting for you to come back."

"Look," said Frank. "Look, I'm flush now. I'll give you the money back."

"Sure you will."

"I was going to give it back anyway."

"I know," said Martin.

"Don't believe him," yelped Gimpy.

"Shut up," said Martin.

"I'll square it," Frank said.

"We figured you would. So the boys and I decided to forget about the whole thing. Anybody can make one mistake."

"You mean it?"

"Sure," said Henderson.

"Why not?" Jopper said.

"We decided we'd shake hands and forget all about it," said Martin.

"Yeah," said Gimpy. "Shake." He held out his hand. Frank shook it.

Henderson came over. "Me too."

They shook.

"I'm glad it's all out in the open," said Frank.

"Yeah, better that way," Henderson nodded.

Then Frank shook hands with Jopper.

"All friends again," Jopper said.

Martin held out his hand. Frank took it.

"We don't figure you'll ever pull that kind of stunt again," Martin said.

"I won't," said Frank.

"You sure won't," said Martin. He began to squeeze Frank's hand.

"Hey —"

"I just don't want you ever to forget this handshake," Martin said. He was grinning.

Then Frank suddenly realized what was going to happen. He tried to get away, but Martin held on.

"No," Frank pleaded. "Not my hand!"

"I don't want you ever to forget," said Martin.

When the bones cracked, Frank Nevitt screamed.

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At the time of this writing, Davis Grubb has had two novels published — THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER (1953) and A DREAM OF KINGS (1955) — both remarkably successful critically as well as commercially. Even bigger things are expected of Davis Grubb . . . He was born in 1919 in Moundsville, West Virginia — a small town on the Ohio River in the Northern Panhandle of the state. When he was only ten years old, his mother took him on a trip from Wheeling to Cincinnati on the great "Queen City," one of the last of the magnificent sternwheelers of the Golden Age of steamboating. This experience, together with a childhood filled with the beauty of riverboats, undoubtedly influenced the river theme in THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER.

Mr. Grubb was educated in the public schools of Moundsville and Clarksburg, West Virginia, and studied painting at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh; but he was not destined to remain a painter — trouble with his eyes forced him to abandon art after only one year's study. Except for this short excursion in another medium of expression, Mr. Grubb has been a writer since the age of seven; he has never wavered from that early resolution, and it is a matter of record that he wrote, illustrated, and bound his first book at the ripe young age of eight. He recalls his earliest literary influences as the stories of Howard Pyle and "John Martin's Magazine." Today his favorite authors include Herman Melville, Mark Twain, William Faulkner, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

Now we bring you an unusual bedtime story by Davis Grubb. It is a tale — like his novels — that has a legendary and mystical quality. You will meet Marius Lindsay who, during an attack of typhoid fever, discovered a terrible secret — a secret that only a dark and twisted mind would welcome and wield . . .

THE SECRET DARKNESS

by DAVIS GRUBB

TO MARIUS, THE FEVER WAS LIKE a cloud of warm river fog around him. Or like the blissful vacuum that he had always imagined death would be. He had lain for nearly a week like this in the big corner room while the typhoid raged and boiled inside him. Mary Ann was a dutiful wife. She

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came and fed him his medicine and stood at the foot of the brass bed when the doctor was there, clasping and unclasping her thin hands; and sometimes from between hot, heavy lids Marius could glimpse her face, dimly pale and working slowly in prayer. Such a fool she was, a praying, stupid fool that he had married five years ago. He could remember thinking that, even in the deep, troubled delirium of the fever.

"You want me to die," he said to her one morning when she came with his medicine. "You want me to die, don't you?"

"Marius! Don't say such a thing! Don't ever —"

"It's true, though," he went on, hearing his voice miles above him at the edge of the quilt. "You want me to die. But I'm not going to. I'm going to get well, Mary Ann. I'm not going to die. Aren't you disappointed?"

"No! No! It's not true! It's not!"

Now, though he could not see her face through the hot blur of fever, he could hear her crying; sobbing and shaking with her fist pressed tight against her teeth. Such a fool . . .

On the eighth morning Marius woke full of a strange, fiery brilliance as if all his flesh were glass not yet cool from the furnace. He knew the fever was worse, close to its crisis, and yet it no longer had the quality of darkness and mists. Everything was sharp and clear. The red of his necktie hanging in the corner of the bureau mirror was a flame. And he could hear the minutest stirrings down in the kitchen, the breaking of a match stick in Mary Ann's fingers as clear as pistol shots outside his bedroom window. It was a joy.

Marius wondered for a moment if he might have died. But if it was death it was certainly more pleasant than he had ever imagined death would be. He could rise from the bed without any sense of weakness and he could stretch his arms and he could even walk out through the solid door into the upstairs hall. He thought it might be fun to tiptoe downstairs and give Mary Ann a fright, but when he was in the parlor he remembered suddenly that she would be unable to see him. Then when he heard her coming from the kitchen with his medicine he thought of an even better joke. With the speed of thought Marius was back in his body under the quilt again, and Mary Ann was coming into the bedroom, her eyes wide and worried

"Marius," she whispered, leaning over him and stroking his hot forehead with her cold, thin fingers. "Marius, are you better?"

He opened his eyes as if he had been asleep.

"I see," he said, "that you've moved the pianola over to the north end of the parlor."

Mary Ann's eyes widened and the glass of amber liquid rattled against the dish.

"Marius!" she whispered. "You haven't been out of bed! You'll kill yourself! With a fever like —"

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"No," said Marius faintly, listening to his own voice as if it were in another room. "I haven't been out of bed, Mary Ann."

His eyelids flickered weakly up at her face, round and ghostlike, incredulous. She quickly set the tinkling glass of medicine on the little table.

"Then how —?" she said. "Marius, how could you know?"

Marius smiled weakly up at her and closed his eyes, saying nothing, leaving the terrible question unanswered, leaving her to tremble and ponder over it forever if need be. She was such a fool.

It had begun that way, and it had been so easy he wondered why he had never discovered it before. Within a few hours the fever broke in great rivers of sweat, and by Wednesday, Marius was able to sit up in the chair by the window and watch the starlings hopping on the front lawn. By the end of the month he was back at work as editor of the *Daily Argus*. But even those who knew him least were able to detect in the manner of Marius Lindsay that he was a changed man — and a worse one. And those who knew him best wondered how so malignant a citizen, such a confirmed and studied misanthrope as Marius, could possibly change into anything worse than he was. Some said that typhoid always burned the temper from the toughest steel and that Marius's mind had been left a dark and twisted thing. At prayer meeting on Wednesday nights the wives used to watch Marius's young wife and wonder how she endured her cross. She was such a pretty thing.

One afternoon in September, as he dozed on the bulging leather couch of his office, Marius decided to try it again. The secret, he knew, lay somewhere on the brink of sleep. If a man knew that — any man — he would know what Marius did. It wasn't more than a minute later that Marius knew that all he would have to do to leave his body was to get up from the couch. Presently he was standing there, staring down at his heavy, middle-aged figure sunk deep into the cracked leather of the couch, the jowls of the face under the close-cropped mustache sagging deep in sleep, the heart above his heavy gold watch chain beating solidly in its breast.

I'm not dead, he thought, delighted. But here is my soul — my damned, immortal soul standing looking at its body!

It was as simple as shedding a shoe. Marius smiled to himself, remembering his old partner Charlie Cunningham and how they had used to spend long hours in the office, in this very room, arguing about death and atheism and the whither of the soul. If Charlie were still alive, Marius thought, I would win from him a quart of the best Kentucky bourbon in the county. As it was, no one would ever know. He would keep his secret even from Mary Ann, especially from Mary Ann, who would go to her grave with the superstitious

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belief that Marius had died for a moment, that for an instant fate had favored her; that she had been so close to happiness, to freedom from him forever. She would never know. Still, it would be fun to use as a trick, a practical joke to set fools like his wife at their wits' edge. If only he could *move* things. If only the filmy substance of his soul could grasp a tumbler and send it shattering at Mary Ann's feet on the kitchen floor some morning. Or tweak a copy boy's nose. Or snatch a cigar from the teeth of Judge Robert Gants as he strolled home some quiet evening from the fall session of the district court.

Well, it was, after all, a matter of will, Marius decided. It was his own powerful and indomitable will that had made the trick possible in the first place. He walked to the edge of his desk and grasped at the letter opener on the dirty, ancient blotter. His fingers were like wisps of fog that blew through a screen door. He tried again, willing it with all his power, grasping again and again at the small brass dagger until at last it moved a fraction of an inch. A little more. On the next try it lifted four inches in the air and hung for a second on its point before it dropped.

Marius spent the rest of the afternoon practicing until at last he could lift the letter opener in his fist, fingers tight around the haft, the thumb pressing the cold blade tightly, and drive it through the blotter so deeply that it bit into the wood of the desk beneath.

Marius giggled in spite of himself and hurried around the office picking things up like a pleased child. He lifted a tumbler off the dusty water cooler and stared laughing at it, hanging there in the middle of nothing. At that moment he heard the copy boy coming for the proofs of the morning editorials and Marius flitted quickly back into the cloak of his flesh. Nor was he a moment too soon. Just as he opened his eyes, the door opened and he heard the glass shatter on the floor.

"I'm going to take a nap before supper, Mary Ann," Marius said that evening, hanging his black hat carefully on the elkhorn hatrack.

"Very well," said Mary Ann. He watched her young, unhappy figure disappearing into the gloom of the kitchen and he smiled to himself again, thinking what a fool she was, his wife. He could scarcely wait to get to the davenport and stretch out in the cool, dark parlor.

Now, thought Marius. Now.

And in a moment he had risen from his body and hurried out into the hallway, struggling to suppress the laughter that would tell her he was coming. He could already anticipate her white, stricken face when the pepper pot pulled firmly from between her fingers cut a clean figure eight in the air before it crashed against the ceiling.

He heard her voice and was puzzled.

"You must go," she was murmuring. "You mustn't ever come here

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when he's home. I've told you that before, Jim. What would you do if he woke up and found you here!"

Then Marius, as he rushed into the kitchen, saw her bending through the doorway into the dusk with the saucepan of greens clutched in her white knuckles.

"What would you do? You must go!"

Marius rushed to her side, careful not to touch her, careful not to let either of them know he was there, listening, looking, flaming hatred growing slowly inside him.

The man was young and dark and well built and clean-looking. He leaned against the half-open screen door, holding Mary Ann's free hand between his own. His round, dark face bent to hers, and she smiled with a tenderness and passion that Marius had never seen in her before.

"I know," the man said. "I know all that. But I just can't stand it no more, Mary Ann. I just can't stand it thinking about him beating you up that time. He might do it again, Mary Ann. He might! He's worse, they say, since he had the fever. Crazy, I think. I've heard them say he's crazy."

"Yes. Yes. You must go away now, though," she was whispering frantically, looking back over her shoulder through Marius's dark face. "We'll have time to talk it all over again, Jim. I — I know I'm going to leave him but — Don't rush me into things, Jim dear. Don't make me do it till I'm clear with myself."

"Why not now?" came the whisper. "Why not tonight? We can take a streamboat to Lou'ville and you'll never have to put up with him again. You'll be shed of him forever, honey. Look! I've got two tickets for Lou'ville right here in my pocket on the *Nancy B. Turner.* My God, Mary Ann, don't make me suffer like this — lyin' abed nights dreaming about him comin' at you with his cane and beatin' you — maybe killin' you!"

The woman grew silent and her face softened as she watched the fireflies dart their zigzags of cold light under the low trees along the street. She opened her mouth, closed it, and stood biting her lip hard. Then she reached up and pulled his face down to hers, seeking his mouth.

"All right," she whispered then. "All right. I'll do it! Now go! Quick!"

"Meet me at the wharf at nine," he said. "Tell him that you're going to prayer meeting. He'll never suspicion anything. Then we can be together without all this sneakin' around. Oh, honey, if you ever knew how much I —"

The words were smeared in her kiss as he pulled her down through the half-open door and held her.

"All right. All right," she gasped. "Now go! Please!"

And he walked away, his heels ringing boldly on the bricks, lighting a cigarette, the match arching like a shooting star into the darkness of the shrubs. Mary Ann stood stiff for a moment in the shadow of the porch vines, her large eyes full of tears, and

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the saucepan of greens grown cold in her hands. Marius drew back to let her pass. He stood then and watched her for a moment before he hurried back into the parlor and lay down again within his flesh and bone in time to be called for supper.

Captain Joe Alexander of the *Nancy B. Turner* was not curious that Marius should want a ticket for Louisville. He remembered years later that he had thought nothing strange about it at the time. It was less than two months till the elections and there was a big Democratic convention there.

Everyone had heard of Marius Lindsay and the power he and his *Daily Argus* held over the choices of the people. But Captain Alexander did remember thinking it strange that Marius should insist on seeing the passenger list of the *Nancy B.* that night and that he should ask particularly after a man named Jim. Smith, Marius had said, but there was no Smith. There was a Jim though, a furniture salesman from Wheeling: Jim O'Toole, who had reserved two staterooms, No. 3 and No. 4.

"What do you think of the Presidential chances this term, Mr. Lindsay?" Captain Alexander had said. And Marius had looked absent for a moment (the captain had never failed to recount that detail) and then said that it would be Cleveland, that the Republicans were done forever.

Captain Alexander had remembered that conversation and the manner of its delivery years later and it had become part of the tale that rivermen told in wharf boats and water-street saloons from Pittsburgh to Cairo long after that night had woven itself into legend.

Then Marius had asked for Stateroom No. 5, and that had been part of the legend, too, for it was next to the room that was to be occupied by Jim O'Toole, the furniture salesman from Wheeling.

"Say nothing," said Marius, before he disappeared down the stiarway from the captain's cabin, "to anyone about my being aboard this boat tonight. My trip to Louisville is connected with the approaching election and is, of necessity, confidential."

"Certainly, sir," said the captain, and he listened as Marius made his way awkwardly down the gilded staircase, lugging his small horsehair trunk under his arm. Presently the door to Marius's stateroom snapped shut and the bolt fell to.

At nine o'clock sharp, two rockaway buggies rattled down the brick pavement of Water Street and met at the wharf. A man jumped from one, and a woman from the other.

"You say he wasn't home when you left," the man was whispering as he helped the woman down the cobbles, two carpetbags under his arms.

"No. But it's all right," Mary Ann said. "He always goes down to the office this time of night to help set up the morning edition."

"You reckon he suspicions anything?"

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The woman laughed, a low, sad laugh.

"He always suspicions everybody," she said. "Marius has the kind of a mind that always suspicions; and the kind of life he leads, I guess he has to. But I don't think he knows about us — tonight, I don't think he ever *knew* about us — ever."

They hurried up the gangplank together. The water lapped and gurgled against the wharf, and off over the river, lightning scratched the dark rim of mountains like the sudden flare of a kitchen match.

"I'm Jim O'Toole," Jim said to Captain Alexander, handing him the tickets. "This is my wife —"

Mary Ann bit her lip and clutched the strap of her carpetbag.

"— she has the stateroom next to mine. Is everything in order?"

"Right, sir," said Captain Alexander, wondering in what strange ways the destinies of this furniture salesman and his wife were meshed with the life of Marius Lindsay.

They tiptoed down the worn carpet of the narrow, white hallway, counting the numbers on the long, monotonous row of doors to either side.

"Good night, dear," said Jim, glancing unhappily at the Negro porter dozing on the split-bottom chair under the swinging oil lantern by the door. "Good night, Mary Ann. Tomorrow we'll be on our way. Tomorrow you'll be rid of Marius forever."

Marius lay in his bunk, listening as the deep-throated whistle shook the quiet valley three times. Then he lay smiling and relaxed as the great drive shafts tensed and plunged once forward and backward, gathering into their dark, heavy rhythm as the paddles bit the black water. The *Nancy B. Turner* moved heavily away into the thick current and headed downstream for the Devil's Elbow and the open river. Marius was stiff. He had lain for nearly four hours waiting to hear the voices. Every sound had been as clear to him as the tick of his heavy watch in his vest pocket. He had heard the dry, rasping racket of the green frogs along the shore and the low, occasional words of boys fishing in their skiffs down the shore under the willows.

Then he had stiffened as he heard Mary Ann's excited murmur suddenly just outside his stateroom door and the voice of the man answering her, comforting her. Lightning flashed and flickered out again over the Ohio hills and lit the river for one clear moment. Marius saw all of his stateroom etched suddenly in silver from the open porthole. The mirror, washstand, bowl and pitcher. The horsehair trunk beside him on the floor. Thunder rumbled in the dark and Marius smiled to himself, secure again in the secret darkness, thinking how easy it would be, wondering why no one had thought of such a thing before. Except for the heavy pounding rhythm of the drive shafts and the chatter of the drinking glass against the washbowl as the boat shuddered through the water, everything was

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still. The Negro porter dozed in his chair under the lantern by the stateroom door. Once Marius thought he heard the lovers' voices in the next room, but he knew then that it was the laughter of the cooks down in the galley.

Softly he rose and slipped past the sleeping porter, making his way to the white-painted handrail at the head of the stairway. Once Marius laughed aloud to himself as he realized that there was no need to tiptoe with no earthly substance there to make a sound. He crept down the narrow stairway to the galley. The Negro cooks bent around the long wooden table eating their supper. Marius slid his long shadow along the wall toward the row of kitchen knives lying, freshly washed and honed, on the zinc table by the pump. For a moment he hovered over them, dallying, with his finger in his mouth, like a child before an assortment of equally tempting sweets, before he chose the longest of them all, and the sharpest, a knife that would sheer the ham clean from a hog with one quick upward sweep. There was, he realized suddenly, the problem of getting the knife past human eyes even if he himself was invisible. The cooks laughed then at some joke one of them had made and all of them bent forward, their heads in a dark circle of merriment over their plates.

In that instant Marius swept the knife soundlessly from the zinc table and darted into the gloomy companionway. The Negro porter was still asleep, and Marius laughed to himself to imagine the man's horror at seeing the butcher knife, its razor edge flashing bright in the dull light, inching itself along the wall. But it was a joke he could not afford. He bent at last and slipped the knife cautiously along the threadbare rug under the little ventilation space beneath the stateroom door; and then, rising, so full of hate that he was half afraid he might shine forth in the darkness, Marius passed through the door and picked the butcher knife up quickly again in his hand.

Off down the Ohio the thunder throbbed again. Marius stepped carefully across the worn rug toward the sleeping body on the bunk. He felt so gay and light he almost laughed aloud. In a moment it would be over and there would be one full-throated cry, and Mary Ann would come beating on the locked door. And when she saw her lover . . .

With an impatient gesture, Marius lifted the knife and felt quickly for the sleeping, pulsing throat. The flesh was warm and living under his fingers as he held it taut for the one quick stroke. His arm flashed. It was done. Marius, fainting with excitement, leaned in the darkness to brace himself. His hand came to rest on the harsh, rough surface of the horsehair trunk..

"My God!" screamed Marius. "*The wrong room!*"

And he clawed with fingers of smoke at the jetting fountain of his own blood.

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Another unusually fine reprint for our **Black Mask** *department*

We promised to tell you a little about Frederick Nebel's likes and dislikes . . . Well, he dislikes all literary gatherings — teas or cocktail parties, amateur or professional. Although as a career writer he has sold more than 5,000,000 words, he does not consider himself a literary person, and despite his vast experience as a professional he has never spoken or written formally on the subject of authorship, its trials and tribulations, its techniques or terminology. His system of working is his own — the one that suits him best. For example, he does not like to write an outline of a story: once the characters and plot are clear in his head, he proceeds directly to the first, and almost final, draft. He believes that a writer, to be good at his job and to be successful, needs three major qualities: talent, fortitude, and, of equal importance, luck. The third quality includes, among other things, good health.

Mr. Nebel does not like the work of Poe, Conan Doyle, or Robert Louis Stevenson — at least, he confesses to never having enjoyed reading about Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, or The Suicide Club. This is surely an unorthodox opinion — and all the more credit to Mr. Nebel for voicing it. Of course, he has literary likes too: he thinks the most exciting writers today are Graham Greene and Georges Simenon. Well, we could argue with Mr. Nebel's dislikes, but we couldn't put up too spirited a debate against his likes . . .

Here is another of Frederick Nebel's taut, emotional, tough-fibered stories — the **Black Mask** *school at its "slick magazine" best . . .*

YOU CAN TAKE SO MUCH

by FREDERICK NEBEL

NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME, AS THEY came up over the top of the ridge, they saw the faint glow of the city, like a luminous cloud on the horizon.

"It ought to be all right all the way in now," Laura said.

Against the cold her arms were folded tight across her chest, her knees pressed together.

© 1940 by Frederick Nebel; originally appeared in the "Woman's Home Companion" under the title "If You Can Take It"

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"It ought to be," Samuel Conway said.

The snowplows had been through here, probably several times: the concrete highway poured clean and fast down through the foothills toward the city. The stars were bright, with a frosty sparkle. The sound the motor made was a dry, tight hum, and the snow on the shoulders waved up into the headlights and past like two endless scarfs.

Lights — the first they had seen in several miles — bloomed suddenly deep in a grove of dark, snow-spattered trees. Conway had expected to see them there and had debated with himself, and was debating now, whether to stop or, with the city only eight or nine miles away, to push on. He didn't care to run into Alice. Still, it was unlikely she'd be in the bar. She never missed a dance. As long as he had known her, she had never missed a dance.

The thing was, he was cold, and he knew Laura was too. The heater had gone wrong on the drive down from the state capital and the inside of the sedan was like an icebox. At the last moment, just as they came round the bend and saw the yellow globes of light on the fieldstone gateposts, he decided to stop.

"We can stand a drink," he said and turned in between the gateposts.

"Here, though?" Laura said, uncertain.

"Why not?"

The big white clubhouse stood among the trees, and the golf course rolled away white and soft and quiet under the stars. He found a place to park. Light from many windows shone on the snow and glimmered on the rimed trunks of the nearer trees, and behind the windows couples were dancing and there was good music.

"They're all dressed," she said. "Everybody's dressed."

"There's a side entrance."

He took hold of her arm and stretched cold kinks out of his legs on the way across to the downstairs entrance. They went down a corridor past the locker room and the game room, and he pushed open a door and she moved in. The top of her hat was level with his eyes. He took her arm again and steered her through the crowd to a table in the rear. It was a country-club crowd, loud, raucous, desperately hilarious.

"Well, well, Mr. Conway," the steward said, replacing a littered ashtray with a clean one, "we haven't seen you in a long time. . . . Madam." He dipped a short, jolly bow toward Laura, his bright, quick glance trying to place her, and failing.

"Hello," Samuel Conway said. "Hello, Ernst. What will you have, Laura?"

"What are you going to have?"

"Brandy and some coffee."

"Oh, good. I'll take that too."

"Yes, yes," said Ernst, placing a packet of matches in the slot on the ashtray, then vanishing.

"You must be dead, Laura," Conway said.

"Oh, well." Her shoulders drooped

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but she lifted them up again. "The coffee and brandy should do wonders. What ever made us think Brionson would lift a finger?"

Conway said, "It was worth trying. Anything's worth trying."

She looked at him, smiling a little, her eyes tender. "You're so good, Sam."

"Well . . ." He shrugged. He flexed his legs beneath the table, then flexed his shoulder muscles in order to get at the burning stiffness in the back of his neck. He constricted all his muscles to a central knot, released them suddenly, letting the tension flood out of him with a rich sense of momentary relief. Eight hours at the wheel — four up to the capital and four back, much of the way over indifferent roads, through snow, and skidding again and again; and three fatiguing hours with Governor Brionson. And all the days and nights that had gone before, all the little failures that coalesced into one crucial failure at the Governor's mansion. He owned a strong body, a good mind, but now, tonight, he was immeasurably tired in mind and body.

"One thing I know," Laura Hefferan was saying in a small, grim voice. "He'll never come out alive."

"There's a chance," Conway said, "that the sentence may be shorter. Three."

"He'll never last three. Not one, even. He's an old man and he's not well. Oh, the people who've let him down — the friends, the friends, the friends!" Her voice was still small, but it was bitter and she put her hands under the table so that she could make hard, white, angry fists.

A waiter brought their brandy and coffee and they drank the coffee black, with the brandy mixed in. And more people came into the bar, coming down the narrow staircase, and there was no longer a background of dance music. It was, Conway realized, looking at his watch, the midnight intermission. He had not thought it was that late.

Seeing Alice, he looked away — not down, but away; for to treat her with offhand good humor, to be even civil to her, was a course of conduct he no longer was able to pursue. You can only take so much so long; then you can take no more.

"Why . . . hel*lo!*" Alice said in her light, bright, chiding voice. She stopped at the table, posing a finger on the edge of it, her white dice-like teeth boxed in a fixed, gay smile. "Why, of all people!"

"Hello, Alice," Conway said, unsmiling. He stood with his hands at his sides.

"Miss Hefferan, how are you?" Alice gushed.

"How do you do, Mrs. Conway," Laura Hefferan said, straight-faced; her upward gaze was steady and cool and noncommittal. In that instant both women measured, challenged, denied each other — Laura out of a disarming candor and Alice Conway, reedlike on her golden slippers, through the synthetic glitter of her wholly artificial cordiality.

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"Roy," Alice said gaily, turning to the yellow-haired, lean-hipped youth who was her escort. "Miss Hefferan, Roy Baker. Roy, this is Sammy."

Roy Baker looked across the table at a dour, inhospitable man, whose big face was tired and with more lines in it than a man of thirty ought to wear. Roy Baker was young, twenty-one or -two, he danced marvelously and drove a fast car — his father's — and sold bonds to friends — his father's — and drank hard and belonged to the right clubs — his father's.

"I'm very happy to know you," young Baker said.

"How do you do," said Conway, unrelenting in his heavy, motionless posture.

"Find a couple of chairs, Roy," Alice directed imperiously.

Conway said, "There's no need, Alice. We were about to leave. You may use these."

"Oh . . . leaving?" Alice said banteringly.

"We're both tired," said Laura, rising.

Conway said, "Good night," dividing his brief, dry glance between Alice and Roy Baker.

"Oh, Miss Hefferan," Alice said, leaning toward her, "I'm dreadfully sorry about your father."

"I'm sure you are," Laura said, straight-faced. "Thank you."

"You poor thing!" Alice sighed.

They walked out of the building and across the dark snowy cold to the sedan. Laura walked swiftly, as if Alice Conway's parting shot still propelled her with a tangible force. Inside the sedan, Conway reached out to switch on the ignition, but the thing inside him, the urge, the swift compulsion, made him turn instead and take her in his arms. She was ready — more than ready, as she always was, meeting his kiss, anticipating his embrace, and folding passionately into it. His hat, knocked off, rolled down to the floor. He didn't want ever to take his lips away, and for minutes he didn't.

"She says things like that," he said, lamely. "She — oh, I don't know, Laura."

"It doesn't matter, darling."

"I — I don't know what to do. I've tried. God knows I've tried. She won't, though. She won't divorce me."

"We'll make it somehow. It can't go on forever."

"It's not as if she loved me. She doesn't. She never did. Maybe she can love somebody. Maybe — I don't know. I doubt it. I've lived three years with her and I still don't know her. She's ice. She's so damned self-sufficient."

"Darling."

"Yes?"

"We'd better go. Kiss me again — that way. Then we'd better go."

Tom Hefferan stood at the casement window with a hot toddy in one hand and the ragged, smoldering butt of a cigar in the other. He always liked a hot toddy around midnight, although his doctor had warned him

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repeatedly against the use of whiskey and tobacco. The doctor had also warned him against allowing himself to become excited. Tom Hefferan had inquired with mordant humor, "How do you stop yourself from getting excited? It's like asking your heart to stop beating, or your brain to stop thinking." It was no concern, for instance, of the district attorney's office how sick you were, how sick in heart and head. Or of the grand jury, which had indicted you. There was no doubt in Tom Hefferan's mind that he would be convicted. He had been too long in politics to indulge in wishful thinking. Only one hope burned constantly within him — that Laura would be taken care of, watched over, sheltered, when he went away.

"You better go to bed, boss," Joe Burger said. He was a block-bodied man in a black alpaca houseman's coat.

"I've done my best, Joe," Tom Hefferan said, speaking his thoughts. "I practically got on my knees and begged her to give Sam Conway a divorce. It was the first time in my life I ever begged anybody. I don't understand her, Joe, this Alice Conway."

Joe had opened his mouth to say something. He closed it, his face turning bleak. There it was again, the way it always was, Joe thought: the boss worrying about other people, forgetting about himself.

Joe looked at the desk on which over a hundred letters lay. They weren't long letters; some of them were only notes, badly scrawled. They were letters from the little people — people the boss had probably never seen. But they remembered his tax reforms, his enlarged school budgets, his sponsored playgrounds, his slum-clearance project which had anticipated by ten years the national government's stroke of conscience. The boss liked kids. He liked the little people. He was polite to women. Nobody ever dared to be offensive to a woman in the boss's presence.

"Joe," Tom Hefferan was saying, and all at once his voice sounded haggard. "Joe, maybe I'm going to have to ask you to help me do something. Joe, we've got to do something for my little girl —" He turned toward the window, peered out. "Well, I guess they're back. Yes, they're back. Open the door, Joe."

"You know me, Mr. Hefferan," Joe said. "I ain't worked for you fifteen years for nothing." He colored a little, for he was not a man who ordinarily put his loyalty into words. For fifteen years he had driven Tom Hefferan's car, made his hot toddies, carried trays when Tom Hefferan was ill. "Yes, boss?"

"We'll talk about it tomorrow, Joe. Open the door."

Laura and Conway came straggling in, and Joe, looking at their faces, knew that their trip to the state capital had failed. He turned away, dropping his eyes, trying to stop his lips from twisting.

"Hello, Laura. Hello, Sam," Tom

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Hefferan said jovially. He was not let down, for he had known all along Brionson would be unable to do anything.

But only Laura knew how that rich, jovial voice drove deep into her heart like a knife. She threw herself into his arms. "Oh, Papa!"

"Some baby!" Hefferan said, giving her a spank. Feeling her body tremble in its terror, he held her tightly for a minute. "Come on, kid, everything's all right."

"Oh, everything's just wonderful!" she cried brokenly.

He looked across her head at Samuel Conway. "It's not Brionson's fault, Sam," he said. "His hands are tied. He's in office only because those guys put him there, and they didn't put him there to be a rugged individualist. Ed's a good egg, really, but the machine won't stand for any by-play." He patted Laura's shoulder. "All I ask, Sam, is you look out for my baby here."

Samuel Conway said dully, "Brionson sent his best wishes. He said he's got to go easy, and keep in line, since he called the troops out against that strike. It damned near ruined him."

"I told him at the time he was a dope to call the troops out," Tom Hefferan said. "Political suicide. He was lucky." He gave Laura another affectionate pat, and said out of nowhere, "I sure wish you two kids were married."

He was, Conway mused gloomily, exasperatingly indifferent about his own fate, his own end. Conway felt a lump push up in his throat, and dropped his eyes.

"Hey, Joe, get the kids a drink," Tom Hefferan was saying.

The maid who let Samuel Conway into the apartment said something about his hat and overcoat. He replied that he would keep them and walked past her into the living room. The maid went to tell Alice he was there.

A year ago Conway had walked out of this apartment. He had not seen it since then and he was here now because he was driven and desperate. The sunlight streaming through the east windows caught him full in the face, revealing the drawn grayness of his cheeks, the circles under his eyes, the dry stubbornness of his lips. It was a room, a place, that he hated, and it had not changed. Not one breath of his character had ever warmed it, not one offshoot of his mind had ever taken root here. Its furniture was pale, light, poised here and there with an air of impermanence; it had a blond coolness and distance and capriciousness. And having been away from it so long, he was aware now how perfectly it complemented Alice.

"Why, Sammy!"

He looked up and saw her coming down the long, light, blond room. Her shell-blue dressing gown swept bell-like from her high, slender waist to the small blue mules.

"Whatever, Sammy? You *here?* This is a surprise!"

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Her gay, fluty voice rankled on his nerves. He drove his eyes coldly round the room, from photograph to photograph — large, framed photographs, head and well-tailored shoulders — seven of them, and all men, all of them good-looking, young, and vapid.

"You were rude last night, Sammy," she said, pouting beautifully, tantalizing him with her large blue eyes.

"Yes," he said.

"Yes, you were, Sammy."

"Yes, I was. Listen, Alice," he said doggedly, "divorce me. I'll make a cash settlement. Get a lawyer. Get Norman Heywood. I'll open my books and assets and you're welcome to as much as you can get. I don't care how much. But I want my freedom. I've got to have it, Alice!"

"Oh, dear," Alice said. "So early in the morning."

"Alice, listen to me!" he urged, his face harassed, his voice thick with the urgency in it.

She was in front of him like a reed, undulating, making a round bud of her lips, making her eyes very round with dismay. She touched his mouth with her index finger.

"Mustn't shout, Sammy."

She swayed away from him, twisting her body in a lithe, delicate movement. It had always been like that, he thought grimly. From the very first. He had never been able to get hold of her, to fuse his mood with hers. She was like autumn leaves cavorting in the wind like smoke, like a moonbeam. She suggested many things and was nothing — nothing tangible. He had never caught up with her. She was marvelously resilient, and this resiliency had always stretched magically beyond his power to snap it.

"I mean it, Alice! Damn it, I mean it!"

She changed the position of one of the photographs and stepped back to eye it with critical approval. Once, the second year of their marriage, Conway in a transport of futile anger had thrown all the photographs — five of them then — out of the window. All the nice young men.

"Really, Sammy, I don't see why I should divorce you. Why should I? After all, Sammy, it was not I who ran out of here; it was you. This is Mel Lanier, Yale '53. Cute, isn't he? Sings divinely."

"All I've got, Alice," he said hoarsely. "It would come to about two hundred thousand."

"Oh, Sammy, so much money all in one lump would frighten me. You know I know nothing about finance. I'd probably lose it right away. I'd much rather have it the way it is now — so much on the first of the month. Then I know where I stand."

"Alice," he groaned.

She patted her hair delicately. It was beautiful hair, spun in streams and curls of pale yellow, set perfectly. He had never been permitted to disarrange it, to grab it between his hands, to feel its soft sensuous silkiness between his fingers.

"No, Sammy, I don't want a

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divorce. I like it this way. It's really very pleasant. One would think I drove you out. I didn't, Sammy. You went. And if you want to come back, the extra suite is there. We might see each other once in a while for dinner."

His face was dark. "I don't know whether you're deliberately vicious or whether you simply lack some essential human element."

She was not, he believed, loose. He had never been able to bring himself to believe that men meant anything to her but a means of innocent enjoyment. She might have been a young girl in school who hung photographs of motion picture actors on the walls. He wished, now, that he could believe in his heart that she was loose; such belief might drive him relentlessly to trap her, to compromise her, to use the last legal resort in order to gain his freedom. But the belief was not in his heart.

"Well, goodness, if you're so madly in love with Laura Hefferan, why don't you live with her? I shouldn't mind. Or why didn't you marry her before? I'm sure I made no effort to cut her out."

"No, God help me. I failed to see her in all your glitter."

"Poor Sammy! Do you mind going now? I have an appointment with the masseuse for eleven."

Conway found himself in the street before he was able to focus his eyes reasonably and arrange his senses in some measure of balance. He strode into a cold wind, with the banging and clatter of snow shovels in his ears. He walked all the way, two miles, to Revere Street, where he had his office, and ran into Joe Burger as the latter came out of the States Life Building. He was so accustomed to seeing Joe in a baggy alpaca houseman's coat or a chauffeur's uniform that he almost failed to recognize him in ordinary street clothes.

"Hello, Joe. Day off?"

Taken by surprise, Joe stood back on his heels. "Oh, Mr. Conway." He gulped. "Sure stays cold, don't it?" He blew his nose. "Well, the boss said I could take off. I guess all work and no play — You know." He made a vague, rambling gesture, then said, "Well, I got to git," and padded off in shiny new rubbers.

In his office, Samuel Conway made a telephone call. "Good morning, Laura. How are you?"

"Sam . . . I knew it would be you! All right, darling. I slept, oh, hours and hours. I can't imagine how I did it. And you?"

"Okay. How's your father?"

"Sam, I don't know what I'm going to do with him. Those hot toddies and all those big, black cigars. He's been warned so many times. He looks like a ghost this morning. Besides, he's very loud and boisterous and hearty — and you know what that means. He's not fooling anybody, including himself. If he'd only break down, feel sorry for himself! But this everlasting show he puts on! . . . Did you hear? The trial starts a week from tomorrow."

"Yes," Conway said slowly. "I've

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been thinking about it, Laura. I—" He stopped. "I'll speak to you about it tonight. I've been thinking . . ."

Wednesday afternoon they dressed in warm woolens and flannels, took ice skates, and drove to Millrun Pond. Smoke from campfires, from the chimneys of winter lodges, stood straight upward in the cold, still air. They parked at one of the lodges, put on their skates, went skimming out across the smooth, thick ice. With their hands behind their backs, their bodies bent forward, they drove with long, rhythmic strokes to the head of the pond.

Laura had desperately wanted to get away from the macabre good humor of her father. And now she tried, desperately, to enjoy the thrill of flying across the ice, of feeling the bright cold on her face and, inside the soft woolens, the cozy warmth of her body. Not once during the hour they skated, watched the bobsled run, the ski-jump, did they discuss themselves or the things that lay in their hearts. Late afternoon they returned to the lodge and stood before the great warm fireplace; they ordered coffee and cakes and sat at a table by a window to watch the sun touch the line of timber on the hills.

"I still think," said Conway, stuffing his pipe, "that he ought to do it."

She didn't have to ask him, "Do what?" She knew, both knew, the thought that lay between them and had lain between them since the first of the week.

"I don't want to see him go up," Conway went on. "There's no longer any doubt, on either side, that he'll go up. Only a detail here and there. For how long, for instance: two years, three years, five. He knows it too."

"He guffaws," she said in a gray voice.

He stared at his pipe, the tobacco golden brown against the charred rim of the bowl. "I don't know what it would be like with you away, but — look at the way things are now. I can't get my freedom. We're just knocking our heads against a stone wall."

He lit his pipe, keeping his eyes away from her face. "Go to New York, catch a plane for South America. You'd be with him, then. Why not?" he demanded, spurting smoke from his mouth. "He wouldn't be running away from a heinous crime. What did he do? He was morally bound to help a police commissioner he'd sponsored. He risked his neck to do it, but he's no criminal."

"Darling," she said, reaching across the table and holding his hand, "I know he isn't. He knows he isn't. Oh, why didn't the commissioner tell Papa he was broke? Why did he take that money from those gamblers? Then Papa had to bribe that magistrate — and they caught him. He had to *try* to save the commissioner!" She drew her shoulders together, pressed her elbows against her side, as if suddenly cold. "But he won't run away. I've talked myself hoarse. . . ."

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When they reached home Tom Hefferan was reading the evening papers in a cloud of cigar smoke. The tray beside him was littered with cigar butts.

Laura turned on Joe Burger. "Joe, why don't you talk to him about those cigars?"

"I did. What good's it do?"

She looked at his clothes. "You've been out."

"Well, yes, m'am."

"I thought I asked you to stay in."

Joe pointed at Tom Hefferan. "He wanted the newspapers."

"We have the newspaper delivered."

"He wanted all of them," Joe Burger said, and tramped out of the room.

"Hello, kids," Tom Hefferan said, throwing the newspapers aside. "What are you picking on Joe for, Laura? How was the skating? Fall on your face?"

"Papa, I don't know what I'm going to do with you," she said, taking the cigar from his mouth and throwing it into the fireplace. She softened. "I hate to nag, Papa, but you know what the doctor said." She went upstairs.

"Well," Tom Hefferan said, winking, "up in the pen, they won't be nagging me all the time. I hope."

Conway didn't smile. "You'd do better," he said, "if you stopped trying to make a joke of this."

"Now you're talking like one of the family too."

Sitting down, Conway said, reflectively and more to himself than to Tom Hefferan, "I wish I were."

"So do I, boy," Hefferan said, stretching his legs, drawing them back in again. "I'd know about my little girl, then. I'd know she wouldn't be alone here in this big house at night. The nights'll be tough on her, Sam, with me up there — and with this wife of yours acting the way she does."

Conway was staring straight at him. "Go away with her," he said flatly, bluntly. "Get out of this. If you're thinking about the bail I put up, forget it. Get out of the country with Laura. In two or three years there'll be a new administration —"

"I couldn't, Sam. Honest to God, I couldn't. I've got to stick my chin out. People with sense know what this is — they know it's a party fight and I happened to move my checkers wrong and got caught. I'm not beefing. According to political practice in this city and in a hundred others, I didn't do wrong — I did right; and that's why I won't run. If I'd ducked out on the commissioner I'd have been a rat. No, boy. They're going to send me up and I'm going up. If it's what they call my medicine, I'll take it. Come up and see me sometime." Tom Hefferan chuckled jovially.

Conway didn't take his eyes off him. He saw the pale, bony cheeks with the flushed patches on the jagged cheekbones. The big bony fingers worked constantly, locking and unlocking. There was no repose in the lips and in the eyes, deepset

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under wiry brows, there was a strange, secretive fire.

"Mix yourself a drink, Sam. If I take one now, Laura'll be on my neck."

Conway sighed, scowled down at his hands, ground the palms together as if there were something between them he wished grimly to crush. He stood up abruptly, crossed the room, and poured out a drink.

"I just can't run away, Sam. If you were in my shoes, you wouldn't run, either. Save your tears for people that can't take it."

"Papa's right," Laura said, standing at the head of the staircase. She came down. "He can't run, Sam. It's something we've got to make the best of. It's not pretty, and there's no last-minute reprieve. For a while I didn't believe this was happening to us, but it is; and it's not a play, it's not something that somebody imagined. No tricks. And no miracles."

Conway did not touch the drink he had poured. He put it down. His heavy shoulders sagged. He knew they were right. Why had he ever let himself believe that Tom Hefferan might run away?

Hefferan slapped his knees. "Drink your drink, Sam. Come on, let's be realists. What are we going to have for supper tonight, Laura? Stay for supper, Sam. Take your things off. Where's Joe? Hey, Joe, take Mr. Conway's things."

Samuel Conway forgot about Alice. His office saw little of him during the remainder of the week. He covered ground that he had covered before. The mayor made him wait two hours in the reception room, then saw him for five minutes. The mayor could do nothing. He was sorry. Too bad about Tom. They'd had some fine times together. No; sorry, so sorry.

He flew to Washington to see a senator who was supposed to have some influence with the governor. But the senator had made a fool of himself over foreign policy, he was in bad odor, he didn't dare make a move. The city, he said, was reform-conscious, and the time was not auspicious to wet-blanket it. He himself had been kicked into office on a solid machine ticket. He believed, privately, that Tom Hefferan was being railroaded — but what could he do?

Wherever Conway went, no matter whom he approached, the refrain was the same. It was the haves against the have-nots. The haves were in office and making the best of it. The reform movement had to keep going forward; it could not go backward; it could not, for that matter, remain still.

He came home to his hotel room late Saturday afternoon, threw himself on the bed, and knew he was beaten. He lay still a long while, flat on his back, his overcoat on, his hat tilted over his eyes. And he was aware more than ever of the littleness of men, the fear in their hearts; and he was aware, too, more than ever, of the greatness of Tom Hefferan, the essential strength of his morality.

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The telephone rang and he let it ring. Then he thought that it might be Laura and got up and answered it.

"Mr. Conway?"

"Yes."

"Sam, this is Norman Heywood. How are you, Sam?"

"Hello, Norman. All right."

"Look, Sam. Alice just phoned me. She wants a divorce."

Conway stood quite still, unmoved, wordless, for a long minute.

"Sam."

"Oh. Oh, yes, Norman. Alice . . ." His throat closed. He looked down at the mouthpiece of the instrument, suspecting a trick.

"How about stopping by Monday, Sam? We can talk things over, come to some sort of agreement beforehand. Monday?"

With a great effort Conway lifted his voice: "Monday? Right. Fine. What time, Norman?"

He hung up, passed his hand across his face, shook himself, and went downstairs. Outside, he entered a taxicab. He was afraid to believe what he had heard. It did not make sense. He eyed it suspiciously in a corner of his mind. He saw nothing of the city through which the taxicab was taking him. When it pulled into the curb and stopped he sat twiddling his thumbs.

"This the address, mister?"

He looked up and saw Tom Hefferan's house.

Joe Burger opened the door and Conway muttered and walked past him — walked six paces before he stopped, scowled, and then spun to get another look at Joe Burger's face.

"What's the matter, Joe?"

Joe's face was gray, stricken.

Conway's eyes leaped. "Joe, what's wrong?" he demanded.

"The boss — the boss —" Joe could not go on.

Conway strode into the living room. He saw Hefferan sprawled on the divan, saw the doctor standing in the middle of the room.

"What's wrong, doctor?"

"Stroke." The doctor was writing something. "I'm waiting for his daughter. She seems to be out shopping somewhere."

"You're waiting . . ."

"Yes," the doctor said quietly. "He died just as I arrived."

Joe put his chin down and headed for the rear of the house and Conway followed him, caught up with him in the pantry. Joe turned, his eyes round. His jaw shook when he said:

"He seen your missus."

Conway leaned forward. "He . . . *what?*"

"He seen your missus this afternoon." Joe sat down heavily. "It was that did it — the excitement. He come out with his face like chalk. I was waiting for him outside where she lives with the car. He come almost running, and I was scared, the way his face was white. I got him home quick. He fell on the floor, just as we got in." Joe put his face in his hands, shook his head.

"Joe, what are you talking about?" Conway said, bending over him.

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"Well, the boss — you know the boss. He was going up. He knew it. And he knew how it was between you and Miss Laura and he didn't want to leave her alone here in the house, all alone. It was against everything in him, what he did. You know how he was about women, how he respected them, how he was a perfect gentleman where women were concerned. Well, he took me in his confidence. He was ashamed, but he knew he had to try to do something for Laura before he went away. Well, he told me to hire this detective agency. You seen me come out of the building, that day. They was to watch — well — your missus, Mr. Conway. I sneaked down to their office every day for the reports. The boss didn't want you or Miss Laura to know what we were doing. He was afraid you'd get mad, you and Miss Laura, and stop him. Mr. Conway, I'm sorry, there was plenty in them reports. Today, he took 'em over to show to your missus. 'Joe,' he says, looking awful, 'this maybe is a dirty trick. I never hurt a hair on a woman's head in all my life. But, Joe,' he says, 'it's her or my little girl — so it's got to be her.' I wanted him to turn them reports over to you. I didn't want him to go see your missus. But he says, 'Joe, if I was a husband, and any guy turned reports like this over to me, no matter what my wife was, I'd smash his face in.' " He dropped his head to the table, groaned, "God, he was a big-hearted guy!"

Conway's face was rigid. He left the pantry and when he stopped in the living-room entrance Laura was on her knees beside the divan. Packages were tumbled all about her on the floor. The doctor was patting her shoulder. He helped her to her feet. Conway could not move.

She saw him and moved her head from side to side and her lips were drawn hard and flat against her teeth. Then she let out a small, choked cry and ran across the room toward him. Her body struck with the force of a propelled object. She clung to him fiercely.

Behind him, Joe Burger said, "The old man's last words were, 'Don't worry, Joe. Sam Conway'll take care of her.' Them were his last words."

"You don't have to worry, Joe," Conway said.

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INTRODUCTION
BY STANLEY ELLIN

Childhood is the time of discovery and improvisation; maturity knows all the answers, or, at any rate, thinks it does. And there is the great barrier between childhood and maturity, because once a man knows all the answers he finds it almost impossible to recapture the living thoughts and emotions of his childhood. They are as dead to him as the statue of some forgotten Great Man in the village square.

Daniel Nathan, in a unique and artful novel, THE GOLDEN SUMMER, *is a writer who succeeds in shattering that barrier between boy and man. He does it in various ways. The physical details of life in a New York State town in 1915 are drawn for us with unerring accuracy. In this town lives a small boy, the Danny Nathan that was, and through some magic the author draws us into him so that we are for a little while what he once was those long years ago.*

It does not make one of your hackneyed cute stories about boyhood — which, I imagine, is what most professional critics boggled at — because young Danny was not the traditional barefoot lad engaged in the rose-colored, adult conception of youthful escapades. He was scrawny and bespectacled. He was full of vague fears and alarms, and had a streak of avarice long and wide enough for any full-grown adult. Yet, he was also sensitive, imaginative, full of loves and loyalties, and, above all, an intuitive master of the fine art of improvisation. He was, in brief, Danny Nathan, and out of him emerged a writer who today can hark back and re-live the past so vividly that we, too, are able to live it with him.

In this episode of "The Boy and the Law" you will discover the art of improvisation at its best. A lost purse, a trial by candlelight, and a bizarre and hilarious legal ruling are all part of it. More than that. You will find in this trial a distorted, yet strangely accurate, reflection of our own adult jurisprudence in all its glory.

But that uncomfortable reflection you will have to blame on yourself, not on Danny . . .

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THE ADVENTURES OF DANNY:

The Boy and the Law

by DANIEL NATHAN

THE NEXT TWO DAYS OF THAT golden summer (so many years ago!) were comparatively quiet — nothing much happened. On Thursday night Danny suggested to Chad and Sartorious that they make some "huckleberry lanterns" — by stringing together old huckleberry or blueberry boxes and putting candles on the bottoms. This seemed like a good idea, so they did it. Then Danny suggested. "Let's go over to the new house and play circus!" This seemed like an even better idea, so they all went to the corner of High and East Water Streets, swinging their lanterns ahead of them.

The new house was still in the early stages of construction. The only finished part was the hollow wooden form into which the concrete for the foundation would soon be poured. Danny did a wirewalking act (some of the boys called it ropedancing) on top of this wooden wall, holding his arms straight out on both sides, with a lighted lantern in each for balance. He minced along the thin edges of the hollow wall, but as he was turning one of the corners, crisscrossing his feet in a real fancy step, a black cat leaped out of the hollow form and so startled Danny that the next thing he knew he was plummeting down into the area which had been excavated for a cellar.

Danny hung on to the lanterns, which darted down with him like two giant fireflies. The lanterns got mixed up in his own tangle of legs and arms, and before Chad and Sartorious could come to the rescue, Danny's shirt and tie had caught fire. The boys were quick on the trigger: they rolled Danny in the mud — it had rained that afternoon — and put out the fire. In this life-saving process Danny's eyeglasses sustained considerable damage: one smashed lens and a broken shaft. Then Danny's two best friends made a hand seat and carried the casualty home — as "disreptile" (to use one of Danny's favorite words) a sight as ever disgraced High Street.

All day Friday, Danny was kept indoors where he divided his time quietly and innocently between looking at colored pictures in the stereoscope and reading *Tom Swift and His Submarine Boat.* Chad and Sartorious were also punished by their respective parents on the generally accepted adult theory that no matter who had

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instigated the affair, the other two were equally guilty as accessories before, during, and after the act. Sartorious summed up the whole incident when he said, half bitterly and half enviously: "Danny gets these crazy ideas of his and he always makes 'em sound so grand we're chumps enough to fall for 'em — yep, like a ton of bricks. Then ten minutes later, just as sure as shootin', we're all in a peck of trouble!"

"Trouble" was the only word to describe what happened on the next day, Saturday. It was hectic, and it didn't let up from early morning until late at night.

Danny's share of the trouble began directly after breakfast. He was standing in the patch of grass in front of the Nathan house, humming a barely recognizable approximation of *Waltz Me Around Again, Willie*, and aiming his BB gun into the empty field diagonally across the street. A new boy had just moved into the house next to the empty lot. His name was Mitch and he was playing alone at the far end of the weed-grown field — considerably out of range of Danny's gun.

Suddenly Mitch caught sight of peewee Danny and his gun. He came tearing through the field, across the street, and over to the Nathan front yard. Mitch was a tall, hulking brute of a boy — almost as big as Owgoost, the son of the neighborhood blacksmith — a ten-year-old version of Jess Willard and "Strangler" Lewis rolled into one. Without giving Danny the slightest warning, he grabbed him by the neck and shouted into one of Danny's big ears.

"What do you think you're doing, you little runt-o?"

Danny was so shocked, and so alarmed, that for a moment he couldn't answer. He tried to wriggle out of Mitch's grip, but Mitch tightened his hold until Danny began to feel a little light-headed.

"I said what are you trying to do, shrimp-o?"

"Why — why — what do you mean, Mitch? I ain't doing nothing — nothing to you anyhow."

"You was shooting that BB gun right smack at me and don't go denying it, squirt-o!"

"I was doing no such thing! I was just *aiming* into the field across the street! 'Sides, this gun couldn't shoot that far — you were playing away off to the back there, almost near Washington Street."

"Yeah? Just you look at my eye!"

Mitch screwed up his left eye and his face took on an expression of pain.

"What's the matter with your eye?" asked Danny.

"What's the matter with it? Don't you go playing innocent, you little gnat-o. You shot a BB smack into my eye, that's what's the matter with it!"

Having established his case, Mitch grabbed Danny's gun with his other hand.

"Just for that, smartie, I'm taking your BB gun!"

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Danny was petrified. His heart pounded so hard that his tiny chest felt like a canary cage with a big cat inside it, clawing to get out.

"Like fun you'll take it! No sir, you won't get away with *that!* I'll just tell my father and he'll —"

"He'll what? Go ahead and tell your father! Who cares? He ain't home anyhow — I seen him go away just before. 'Sides, my father can lick your father with his hands tied behind his back! He'll mop up this here street with him!"

"I'll tell my father and he'll tell the police!"

"Yeah and I'll tell my father to send your father a bill for a new eye — why, I might need a noperation!"

By this time Mitch had restored his face to its normal appearance and Danny could see nothing whatever wrong with Mitch's left eye. Danny hung on stubbornly to the butt of his BB gun.

"You're just saying I hit you with a BB — you're just saying it for an excuse!"

Mitch scowled. "Suppose I am, squirt-o? What are you going to do about it? Here, leggo that gun — I'm taking it and you nor your father nor even the police'll stop me."

Danny turned his head in panic. He caught a glimpse of his mother working in the parlor — the front door was open and he could see her between the tall, hand-painted jardinières of Copenhagen blue.

"Hey, Mom! *MOM!* Mitch is trying to steal my BB gun!"

Mrs. Nathan came out onto the front porch. Her hair was swathed in a dust cloth and she was holding a broom in her hand. She was a gentle woman, with a kind and perpetually worried face; but in full dusting regalia she presented an awe-inspiring appearance.

At the sight of Danny's mother Mitch suffered a quick change of heart. He let go of the gun and of Danny simultaneously, turned tail, and scooted off across the street.

Danny stood there, the big cat in his chest still trying to claw its way out.

It had been a close call. When Mitch was far enough away, Danny shook the gun at him and let loose a string of epithets — the most insulting ones he could think of. Then he added, "Aw go roll your hoop!" But Danny knew that was not enough: he would never be satisfied until he had had his revenge.

The opportunity for vengeance came sooner than Danny hoped for — although he was not aware of it at the time. Early that afternoon the boys were playing follow-the-leader in the cornfield next to Barnaby's Barn, and Mitch forced his way into the game.

Now Mitch — to quote from one of the printed titles in *Broncho Billy and the Land Grabber*, which most of the boys had seen at The Happy Hour moving picture house the previous Saturday — was a "mighty bad hombre." He was mean and un-

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principled. He was a braggart and know-it-all. He had developed the use of threats to a fine art. Unfortunately for Danny and his friends, Owgoost was not around this Saturday — his father had taken him to Binghamton to visit relatives for the week-end. Owgoost was the only boy in the neighborhood who could handle Mitch without difficulty. It was significant that when Owgoost participated in a game, Mitch never even put in an appearance.

Chad was leader and during one of the stunts the fellows had to follow Chad's lead and walk on their hands, with their feet up in the air. Mitch did it along with the other boys and shortly after the performance of this trick, Mitch let out a yowl. He had lost his little pocketbook.

Mitch kept his loose change in a small leather pouch, with an Indian's head burned on one side and a button clasp at the top.

"Who stole my pocketbook?" bellowed Mitch. "I'll kill the little rat-o that went and stole my money!"

The other boys protested. They might borrow things occasionally, when circumstances made it necessary, but they were not thieves.

"C'mon, you little thief-o, whoever you are! Just hand back my pocketbook with all the money still in it or someone'll be sorry, someone here will find himself in the horsepistol!"

The boys fidgeted in their embarrassment. Such an accusation had never been leveled at them before — only a new kid would have the nerve.

Mitch was now in a rage. "I'm gonna search every one of you — and don't try and stop me!"

The fellows submitted to the humiliation of a mass search.

No one, of course, had the missing pocketbook.

Then Chad, who had been seething inside, spoke up. "Guess you're satisfied now. You probably dropped it — probably fell out of your pocket when we were all walking on our hands. Like as not it's somewheres in the cornfield right this minute. Anyhow, Mitch, this is the last time we let you play with us. Right, fellas?"

Everybody, including Danny, nodded their heads vigorously.

The boys began to walk off. Mitch changed his tactics — he became almost fawning, as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth.

"Look, fellas. Least you could help me find it — that's not asking too much. C'mon, let's be pals and help a guy find his money."

Chad glanced around. "All right, we'll help you — but you don't deserve it. C'mon, fellas, let's try and find his dirty old money pouch — but just you remember, Mitch, this is the last time we let you play with us and that's a fact."

The boys tried to recall which part of the cornfield they had been in when they were walking on their hands. There was some disagreement, but finally they decided on the corner nearest Mrs. Gill's house. They spread out, got down on their hands and knees, and explored the

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furrows between the cornstalks, and even looked into the near-ripe husks with their browning beards. But after twenty minutes of burrowing and sifting and scratching like hens they gave up. There was no sign of the pocketbook.

Again the boys were about to leave, and again Mitch stopped them.

"Tell you what, fellas," said Mitch. "If one of you guys just happen to find it later, I'll give the finder a reward. Word and honor, I promise — and you're all witnesses."

"How much?" asked Danny promptly.

"I'll tell you, fellas. Whoever finds the money, I'll give him half of it — yes sir, half of it!"

"How much did you have in the pocketbook?" pursued Danny.

Mitch suddenly got cagey. He munched on his protruding underlip.

"Yeah," said Chad, "tell us how much you had so we know how much reward'll be coming to the one who finds it."

Mitch started counting on his fingers, then he shrugged. It was an elaborate and suspicious shrug. "Can't be sure — but it was a heap of money, I'll tell you that! But I'll still give the finder a whole half of it."

The boys went back into the cornfield and began searching again. But after another half hour of fruitless grubbing they quit. There was still no sign of Mitch's pocketbook.

The treasure hunts in the cornfield proved to be a full-blown calamity to Danny. When the boys decided to go over to Seaman's Drug Store for some penny glasses of Moxie or "sassp'rilla" — scrabbling around in the hot cornfield had made them all thirsty — Danny looked in the slanted side pocket of the overalls he was wearing and the three pennies he was sure he had on him were gone. They must have fallen out of his pocket while he was searching — just the way Mitch's pocketbook had fallen out.

Danny was profoundly depressed. Nothing seemed to be going right this day. True, he went home and persuaded his mother, even though it was so near to supper, to let him have a big glass of homemade root beer — but even the biggest glass of root beer in the world couldn't make up for the three cents he had lost.

Yes, it had been an unhappy day so far. In fact, Danny was beginning to view Mitch with deep misgivings. He seemed to be a Jonah, a hoodoo. Danny couldn't seem to tangle with him without having trouble or sustaining a loss. And to make the unhappiness of the day complete, Danny broke two of his toys while waiting for supper call: the rubber bulb of his water pistol split at the seam and the wire spring in one of his bagatelle boards snapped right in two — just as he was pulling back the plunger for what he was positive would be a 1000-point shot.

At the supper table Danny moped. He was worried and fretful: would to-morrow bring further misfortunes? Danny had not learned — and was

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destined never to learn — one of the wisest rules of living: there is no sense in worrying about to-morrow when you don't even know what else may happen to you to-day.

As he sat at the large round extension table in the center of the dining room, under the domed chandelier of varicolored stained glass, he gazed sightlessly at the china cabinet against the wall. He was totally unaware of the cabinet's shelves, crammed with plates and pitchers of gleaming cut glass. He did not even see the magnificent punch bowl with its sparkling cups hanging around the saw-toothed and scalloped rim. He could only sit there, oblivious to his surroundings, and keep wishing that he had a little Billiken to carry around in his pocket, or even an old rabbit's foot that he could rub every once in a while — just for a change in luck . . .

That evening there was excitement. At supper-time Sartorious had gone out alone to the cornfield on a money-searching expedition and with the help of a flashlight had found the pocketbook.

Word had spread like ripples on a pool and that night all the fellows of the neighborhood met at the clubhouse in the Nathan back yard — to witness the formal return of the pouch and the presentation of Sartorious's reward.

The clubhouse was a six-foot by eight-foot partially renovated chicken coop, still standing somewhat askew on its original earth floor. The renovations had consisted of an interior whitewashing — graywashing, to be more accurate; the cutting of a small hole in the south wall — facing in the direction of Barnaby's Barn — and covering it with a sheet of isinglass; and the installation of various and sundry furniture, including a battered old table borrowed from Sartorious's attic. The table had only three and a half sound legs — the boys called it a "gimpy" or lame table; the half leg was rather precariously mended with a hickory stump, attached by tightly wound shoestrings and a few carpet tacks. There were four splintery egg crates which served as chairs, and an indescribable whatnot of three shelves, filled to capacity with old cigar boxes, each containing precious possessions of the secret society of which Danny, Chad, and Sartorious were the charter — and only — members.

Two boxes that had originally been full of Lord Macaulay 10-centers now contained an accumulation of *POsTiGe STaMPs*, one sublabeled *US*, the other *FOriN*. A Cinco cigar box safeguarded the club's collection of *CigAr BANds* — the garish and grandiose slips of paper ("Perfeccion Suprema") similar to those which Danny had pasted on the back of the glass ash tray now on the table in the Nathan sitting room. A Van Dyck box was brimful of *ToPs*. Two Peter Schuyler boxes overflowed with the club's combined resources of *MarBULs*, one devoted to *cATs-Is* and

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the other to a curious species with cloudy centers highly prized locally and known as *REeLEEs* — an abbreviation of "really real ones." There were other miscellaneous treasures, too numerous (and mysterious) to catalogue.

While all the boys watched intently, Mitch opened the button clasp of the pocketbook, turned the pouch upside down, and let the contents fall on the three-and-a-half-legged table. Seven pennies and one nickel bounced and rolled on the table top.

Danny made the official computation.

"Adds up to twelve cents and half of twelve is six — so Sart gets a reward of six cents. *Havvies!*"

"Nothing doing, Danny — not on your tintype!" protested Sartorious. "I went out alone and found it all by myself. No sir, no divvying up this time —"

"But I said havvies —" persisted Danny, although he knew he didn't have a ghost of a show.

"No *sir*," said Sartorious stubbornly. He appealed to the other boys. "Ain't I right, fellas? No havvies on reward money — ain't that so?"

If the law of "havvies" were enforced, Danny alone would have been entitled to a share — he was the only one who had even thought of calling out the magic word. So, with nothing to gain for themselves, the boys ruled that Danny had no right to half of Sartorious's six cents.

"How about thirdies then?" said Danny, figuring that if he could effect a compromise, a one-third share of Sartorious's reward would at least reimburse him for most of his own loss in the cornfield that afternoon.

But the boys voted against that too. Besides, who ever heard of "thirdies"? Danny had pulled a new rabbit out of his sleeve.

It was another discouraging setback. Somehow, no matter how hard he tried, Danny couldn't seem to change the course of his luck.

Sartorious was becoming impatient. Mitch had put the twelve cents back into the pocketbook and was holding the pouch behind his back. He had made no move to hand over Sartorious's half.

"How about my reward money, Mitch?" Sartorious shifted clumsily from one foot to the other. "C'mon, pony up like you went and promised."

"Yeah," said Stubborn Sid, "hand it over to Sart. He earned it."

Mitch remained silent.

The other boys exchanged glances. Was Mitch intending to welch? According to all existing codes, welching was an absolutely unforgivable crime. The boys looked at each other again and tacitly came to an agreement. Sartorious deserved the money and he was going to get it — even if they had to "learn" Mitch a lesson.

Chad said ominously: "You gave your word and honor. We was all witnesses."

"Yeah," said Sid, "fork over the six cents to Sart here."

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Then Mitch opened up. "He got his reward money already — the dirty little thief!"

Sartorious exploded. "What do you mean I got my reward? You didn't give me a cent, did he, fellas? You all seed — did he give me even one red cent?"

The boys were tight-lipped now. They nodded meaningfully and began muttering.

Chad planted himself in front of Mitch, and Chad's freckled face was white. "What do you mean Sart got his reward? What do you mean calling Sart here a thief? Yeah, what do you mean?"

Mitch glanced around. He was beginning to appreciate his position. They were all obviously against him — every single one of them. Nevertheless he decided to go ahead with his plan.

"Look here, fellas," he said placatingly. "It's perfectly plain. When I lost this pocketbook it had more'n twelve cents in it. At supper to-night I remembered exactly how much was in this pouch — I remembered to the exact penny. There was twenty-four cents in it this afternoon — God's honest truth, twenty-four cents. I can tell you exactly — the seven pennies and the nickel you all seen and an extra two cents *and* a dime!"

The eyes of all the boys focused on Mitch's face. They kept staring at it. After a few moments Mitch's eyes fell and his lips began to tremble slightly. Perspiration broke out on his dark forehead. He started shuffling his feet.

The boys knew he was lying — they were dead sure of it. They knew it was just a mean trick on Mitch's part so that he could get out of paying Sartorious the reward.

Chad turned to the other fellows. "It's Mitch's word against Sart's here. What'll we do?"

Sid made it short and sweet. "Let's just mopolize him."

Even the gentle summer breeze outside the clubhouse stood still. Mopolizing was the severest form of physical punishment imaginable.

The boys clenched their fists and moved forward.

"No!" shouted Danny.

If the mopolizing took place in the clubhouse, the flimsy chicken coop would be a shambles in two minutes flat. It might even be torn down in the battle royal that was bound to ensue.

"No!" repeated Danny, at the top of his squeaky voice. "That's not the way to do it! You gotta —"

"What do you mean that's not the way?" said Chad. "You getting chicken-hearted, Danny? There ain't no other way and you know it!"

Danny waved his toothpick arms. "No, fellas! It's like what my father calls a trial case. You gotta —"

"What do you mean a trial case?" asked Sid.

"You know — like a trial in a court. I say you got to hold a trial right here in the clubhouse. Sart and Mitch will be the witnesses. They'll

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give their — you know what they call it, testimony — and the court will decide. That's the way you have to do it, fellas — that's the real way!"

The boys considered Danny's suggestion. Its potential drama appealed to them. Besides, it was only fair. They whooped their approval and argued ways and means. The discussion became so heated that for a panicky moment Danny thought his ruse had failed — they might tear the clubhouse apart anyway.

But Chad saved the situation. He nominated Danny as judge, in full charge of the trial.

As Chad explained: "Why shouldn't Danny be the judge? Don't he know more about law perceedings than all the rest of us put together?"

A few minutes later Danny carefully straightened his eyeglasses, whose lenses were bigger than silver dollars, and banged the three-and-a-half-legged table with the hammer he had borrowed from his father's tool chest. The two candlesticks, borrowed from the parlor, shook and the smoking flames almost blew out.

"Court's in session!" announced Danny. "Order in the court — now quiet, will you, fellas? We got to conduct this here trial according to Hoyle."

The boys were seated on the earth floor of the clubhouse, the shadows and flickering candlelight making zebra patterns on their rapt faces. Danny, as he thought befitting a judge, had put on his father's fedora, which he had also borrowed for the occasion — from the antlered hat-tree next to the umbrella stand with the porcelain basin. The fedora came over Danny's big ears and more than halfway down his head, but even so, he felt sure it added a desirable touch of dignity to his appearance.

Again Danny banged with the hammer.

"First witness! Mitch, do you swear to tell the truth, every bit of the truth, and nothing 'cept the truth . . . You're supposed to say 'I do.' "

Mitch grumbled, "I do."

Danny's face assumed a severe expression.

"You're supposed to say 'I do, Your Honor.' "

"What?" said Mitch.

"Say 'I do, Your Honor' . . . That's the law in trial cases."

"Who says so?" challenged Mitch.

Danny pounded the table. "I say so, and I'm the judge, ain't I, and don't the judge know the right rules of — of — of etiquette?"

"All right," conceded Mitch, and then added sullenly, "I do . . . Your Honor."

A glow of satisfaction warmed Danny's innards. His voice took on a lilt.

"Now tell your story, Mitch — tell us only the facts and nothing but the facts. You got to tell us the whole evidence."

Mitch repeated his story, in detail — how his pocketbook contained twenty-four cents, how it was lost,

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how two searches that afternoon had failed to turn it up, and how he had promised a reward of half the money in the pouch to the one who found it.

Danny banged the table with his hammer-gavel.

"Any cross-zamination?"

"What's that?"

"The other party of the other part's got the right to ask the first party questions. That's you, Sart."

"Who me?"

"Yeah, you. You want to ask Mitch here any questions?"

Sartorious rolled his eyes, thinking.

"Naw, I got no questions to ask. I just want my money, that's all — I want my six cents reward."

Mitch interrupted angrily. "You *got* your reward, Sart-o!"

Sartorious raised his heavy fists. "No, I ain't! Don't go saying that again, Mitch, or I'll —"

Danny hit the table so hard that the repaired half leg gave way and both candlesticks tumbled to the ground. Chad rescued the candles and relit them. Danny propped up the table with an egg crate and proceedings were resumed.

"Look here, fellas," warned Danny, "you got to follow the rules. Mitch, you ain't got *no* right to talk to Sartorious till it's time for you to cross-zamin. Order in the court, fellas! Got to have order in the court or there can't be no trial!"

When the confusion had simmered down Danny went on: "Now it's your turn, Sartorious — you swear to tell the whole truth and everything? . . . Didn't you hear me before, Sart? You're supposed to say 'I do.' "

Sartorious said, "I do."

"Now give your story, Sart —"

"Hey there —" yelled Mitch.

Danny pounded with the hammer. "No interruptions, Mitch!"

"Yeah, I know, but why didn't you make Sart-o say 'Your Honor'? You made me!"

Danny did his best to scowl convincingly. "Now look here, Mitch, you're only a witness. The judge knows the rules and regulations better'n any old witness — that stands to reason, don't it? So just you leave the judge in full charge of all the perceedings . . . Now, Sart, go ahead and give your story — everything you can remember, and in your own words."

Sartorious grinned, as if a highly technical point of law had just been decided in his favor. Then, in his blundering way, he told how he got the idea at supper-time to look for the pocketbook alone, how he took his Eveready — even though it was still light outside — poked around in the cornfield and found the pocketbook — not near Mrs. Gill's house, where they thought it would be, but in the opposite corner.

"Out where Mitch fell off the woodpile — remember? And that's all I got to say. I just want my money — the reward."

Danny banged again, this time gently. "Got to give the second party of the first part his chance to cross-

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zamin. Mitch, you got any questions to ask Sart here?"

Mitch's bravado had come back. He spoke with his old jauntiness. "Yes sir, I sure got some questions, Judge-o! Sartorious, you found that pouch long about supper-time like you said — I'm willing to grant that. But when you found it, it had twenty-four cents inside it. Ain't that so?" thundered Mitch.

"'Snot!" yelled back Sartorious.

"When you got back home with the pocketbook, after you found it, you opened it up, didn't you? You admit that, don't you?"

"Course I opened it — anyone would! Wanted to see how much money was in it — you never *would* tell us! Wanted to see how much reward I was going to get. What's wrong with that?"

"And you found twenty-four cents and took twelve — half of it — took your reward right away, didn't you? Tell the truth, didn't you grab your reward right away, before coming over here?"

"Didn't do no such thing — not by a jugful! Was only twelve cents in that dang old pouch all the time just like I keep on saying!"

Mitch put on the most fearsome expression in his repertory. He scowled, grated his teeth, and blinked his eyes threateningly.

"Was *so* twenty-four cents in that pouch and anyone 'at says different is a cockeyed liar *and* worse, and I'll —"

Sartorious was now ready to fight. "*You're* the cockeyed liar, Mitch, and I'll —"

Danny banged and banged. The half leg of the table collapsed again. The candles fell again. He kept yelling in the darkness: "That's all! The defense rests! The persecution rests! Time for the judge to decide — soon's we have some light!"

When the candles were relit and order restored, Danny tried to be curt in his disapproval. "Now no more wrangling between the witnesses — you just *gotta* listen to the judge." He emphasized his judicial displeasure by banging three more times with the hammer. Then in a milder tone he announced: "The court says there will be a recess for a couple of minutes — while the judge looks up one of his special law books."

Danny took off the fedora and placed it carefully on the table — a simple precaution that would forestall any questioning in case his father caught him sneaking back into the house. Then, with almost religious dignity, Danny walked slowly out of the clubhouse; but as soon as he was out of sight of the other boys, he broke into a sprint, heading for the front porch and the side door of the Nathan house. Once in the house he easily managed to creep upstairs unseen — his father and mother, fortunately for Danny, were sitting in the kitchen.

In his bedroom Danny ransacked his crowded, homemade bookcase. The prize he had won in Sunday school for his speech on the great

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prophet Daniel was a book written by his Sunday-school teacher and privately printed in the town. Stacks and stacks of shining copies of the book leaned against one of the walls of his teacher's study, waiting to be handed out to deserving pupils. The book was called *Folk Lore of Many Nations*, by Emmanuel B. Marcus.

There was a story in that book about a rich man who had lost a bag of gold coins, and after the bag was found by a poor villager, a controversy arose — just like the one between Sartorious and Mitch. Danny remembered dimly that a wise old judge had been consulted and had settled the argument with both wit and wisdom, but he could not recall the old judge's exact method. Where *was* that book? And then he spied it — between his dog-eared copies of *Tarzan of the Apes* and *Tik-Tok of Oz*.

Danny flipped through the pages. The story was near the end of the book — ah, here it was, on page 112. Rapidly he read through his teacher's version of the old folk tale. So that was the way the wise man of the village had done it! That old judge sure was clever, and his solution fitted Danny's problem like a silk glove. Danny snapped the book shut, and a grin spread over his face from ear to ear. He thrust the book into the nearest open space on the top shelf — between *Baseball Joe in the Big League* and Horatio Alger's *Sink or Swim* — and left the house as quickly and silently as he could.

Back in the clubhouse, the boys were buzzing. Danny replaced the fedora, adjusted his nickel-plated eyeglasses, and rapped vigorously.

"Court's back in session! Quiet, will you, fellas? Before the judge gives the decision, I want to ask the two witnesses just one more question — and answer straight to the point, witnesses! Now, Mitch, exactly how much money was in the pocketbook you lost in the cornfield?"

Mitch roared: "Twenty-four cents! Like I said! And anybody who says —"

Danny interrupted: "You answered — twenty-four cents. Now, Sart, exactly how much money was in the pocketbook you found in the cornfield?"

Sartorious said belligerently: "Exactly twelve cents, no more, and anybody who says —"

Danny interrupted again: "Now the judge will give the decision. Order in the court!"

He waited for complete silence. Then, with both elbows on the table and his tiny chin resting on the backs of his tiny fists, and his big round glasses perched high on his big nose, Danny utilized the smattering of folk lore that he had brushed up on in his bedroom.

"Mitch lost a pocketbook with twenty-four cents in it. And Sart found a pocketbook with twelve cents in it. Anybody can see they were *different* pocketbooks. A pocketbook with twenty-four cents and a pocketbook with twelve cents ain't the same pocketbook!"

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Danny paused to let the logic of this ancient reasoning sink in.

"So if they weren't the same pocketbook, then Sartorious *didn't find Mitch's pocketbook!* And if he didn't find Mitch's pocketbook, then he must have found somebody else's lost pocketbook. And if he found *somebody else's* lost pocketbook then Mitch don't need to give Sartorious any reward — no reward at all!"

He let that sink in.

The boys gasped. Then they wailed with open disappointment. The trial didn't seem to them to be turning out right. But they didn't foresee the final verdict of the court.

Danny banged for attention. When the boys quieted down, he pressed his thin lips together doggedly and continued:

"But if Sartorious found *somebody else's* pocketbook — not Mitch's, you understand — then he don't need to give it to Mitch. Everybody here knows the law — finders keepers. So Sartorious keeps the whole pocketbook with the twelve cents in it!"

When *that* sank in, the fellows roared their approval. Mitch was boiling mad and he would have taken the law into his own hands right then and there. But he looked around and realized the extent to which he was outnumbered. And he saw too that all the boys had ratified Judge Daniel Nathan's final decision with clenched fists.

Mitch dropped the pouch on the table, growled menacingly under his breath, and then departed, his tail definitely between his legs.

On the way back to the house, around the pea patch and past the grape trellis, Danny couldn't help worrying. Would Mitch seek some underhanded means of retaliation? Danny made up his mind to shoot the BB gun only in the back yard from now on — to minimize the chances of further provocation.

The verdict he had rendered involved a risk he had had to take — in the interests of common justice. But then his whole life, it seemed, was just one risk after another anyway. Besides, he had gained his revenge. That counted for something, no matter what trouble might lie ahead. "Yes sir," he told himself, "yes sir, Mitch-o, that'll learn you!"

Curled up later in the Morris chair in the sitting room, he reviewed the complicated events of the day. "Here I helped Sart, but I'm still out three cents of my own money that I lost — and through no fault of my own. It was really that there Mitch's fault, that's what it was — if he didn't lose his money in the cornfield, I wouldn't have lost mine looking for *his.* And Sart, he could have give me a share of the money he found, specially after I went and showed how it weren't Mitch's money at all."

Justice, Danny decided, was not always just. But then he reconsidered. "Perhaps Sartorious is right in keeping all the money to himself. Judges

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ain't supposed to take money, specially when they give a fair and honest decision. Everybody knows that — it's a law or something. And the fellas did elect me judge — so I guess I got to act like one."

But Danny had underestimated the power of the law, the awful grip it had on the conscience of man and boy.

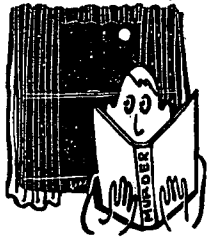
Later that night Sartorious came shambling around to the Nathan house.

"I been thinking it over," said Sartorious, rubbing his palms awkwardly on his thighs, "and I come to the 'clusion that the law is the law and you just can't get around it. So when you said havvies, Danny, you sort of had the law on your side and I should of stuck by it. Can't go around breaking important laws like havvies."

And Sartorious handed Danny six cents — half of his "treasure-trove."

Danny had a good feeling inside of him when he went to bed that night. Something told him he would have no more trouble with Mitch — not with Sartorious standing by him, and Chad, and all the other fellows. Still it might be wise, just to be on the safe side, to shoot his BB gun only in the back yard.

And there was something else that made Danny fall asleep a happy boy. The net gain of three cents, after a day of near disaster, renewed all Danny's faith in the laws of his own world.



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Pardot of the French Sûreté had reason to be sad again . . .

THE NAPOLEONIC CLUE

by VICTOR CANNING

MONSIEUR ALBERT PARDOT OF THE French Sûreté was forty-five, plump, bald, and cheerfully optimistic. For six years he had never completed a holiday without being recalled to Paris to be put on some urgent job. But this year, with fourteen of his eighteen days of skiing holiday in the French Alps gone, he felt he was about to break his record.

He sat now quite happily resting just within the fringe of the pine woods on a high slope overlooking the gentle bowl of a snow-filled valley. Two miles away lay the mountain inn run by Monsieur Mendel where Pardot was staying with five other guests.

The afternoon light was going and Monsieur Pardot was just thinking of strapping on his skis and setting out for the inn when he saw a figure come out of the woods high up on the left of the valley and begin to ski downwards. He recognized him at once. It was Monsieur Henri Chardin, another guest from the inn. His green ski jacket stood out colorfully against the snow. He was an excellent skier and, like Pardot, kept to himself and away from the easy slopes around the inn.

Henri Chardin was almost at the bottom of the valley when there was a faint call from the woods high up on the right-hand side of the bowl.

Chardin stopped, sending up a spurt of snow as he braked. Monsieur Pardot saw another figure come out of the trees and glide down towards the waiting man. Again he had no difficulty in recognizing who it was from the clothes: a red woollen cap, white ski jacket, and black trousers — Madame Chardin.

The woman came down the slope and drew up alongside her husband. She thrust her ski sticks into the snow, reached inside her white jacket, and pulled out something that glinted for a moment in the westering sun. There was a sharp report, a burst of echoes from the surrounding woods, and then Madame Chardin was skiing rapidly down the valley. She was out of sight before Pardot had strapped on his skis.

He didn't hurry. At two-foot range not even a woman would miss. He went down the long slope and his face was sad and frowning — the sadness because he saw so much of life's blackness and the frown because here was another holiday spoiled for him. He drew up alongside Monsieur Chardin and one look told him there was nothing he could do. He crossed himself and then stood there lost in thought.

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So far as Pardot knew, the Chardins had been happy enough, but the front a married couple put up for the world was not necessarily a true reflection of their relationship. Staying with the Chardins was another man, a French naval captain called Paul Bonet.

Pardot groaned to himself and then set off to climb the long slope toward the spot where Madame Chardin had first appeared. If she had planned to murder her husband, she must have been waiting up there, and Pardot — to the irritation sometimes of his superiors and the discomfort of many a criminal — liked to start at the beginning.

He was panting hard by the time he reached the spot, about five yards inside the trees, where she had been waiting. There were a few cigarette ends marked with lipstick at the base of a pine, and he guessed that she had been waiting there for at least half an hour.

He returned to the body of Monsieur Chardin and then began to follow Madame Chardin's tracks towards the inn. As he had expected, he lost them in a maze of old and new tracks on the easy slopes just above the inn.

Monsieur Mendel, the innkeeper, was in his private office when Pardot entered. Pardot explained to him what had happened and showed his Sûreté card.

"But in the register, monsieur, you put yourself down as a schoolteacher?"

"I like to have my holidays undisturbed. But I am doomed. I must now telephone the local gendarmerie for an inspector to come up. Arrangements must also be made about the body."

"But all this is terrible, monsieur! It will give my inn a bad name." Monsieur Mendel wrung his hands. He was a tall, gaunt-looking man, no advertisement for the excellent food he served.

"It is terrible, but have no fear — it will bring people to your inn, monsieur. Now, I shall take a glass of pernod before I telephone and you will give me some information."

Glass in hand, Pardot leaned back in the office chair and put his feet up on the desk. "First, the skiing outfits of your guests. Madame Chardin wears a white jacket and a red cap. Is she the only one with those colors?"

"She is, monsieur. She and her husband have come here for many years. They both bought their jackets in the village. They are good coats, a local design, and not too expensive."

Monsieur Mendel nodded to his own navy-blue ski jacket that hung on a hook behind the office door. "Monsieur Chardin had a green one."

"And Captain Paul Bonet?"

"He has been in his room all day, monsieur, with a *mal d'estomac*. He wears a yellow jacket quite unlike theirs. The other two guests . . . but they have made an excursion on the bus today to the local cathedral and have not skied."

"What do they wear?" Pardot knew who they were: a student from the University of Paris and his fiancée who had kept to themselves.

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"They wear thick woollen sweaters, monsieur. Gray, I think."

Pardot nodded, then picked up the telephone, and called the gendarmerie. An hour later the local inspector arrived and was plainly irritated to find Pardot in charge Pardot gave him all the facts he had and then comforted him by saying, "I do not intend to interfere, *mon inspecteur*. It seems clear that Madame Chardin murdered her husband. It was a lonely spot. She could well have known that it was a route he always took. Unfortunately I happened to be there. But do not let us be fooled by appearances. Only one thing I ask: when you have questioned all these people, please come and discuss the matter with me before you make an arrest. I shall stay here until your return."

The inspector twisted his mouth as though he had bitten into a sour apple. "On that point, of course, monsieur, I shall have to use my own discretion."

Pardot shrugged his shoulders. He'd heard the phrase before and it always depressed him.

The inspector went off with the innkeeper and within twenty minutes he was back with the innkeeper and Madame Chardin. Pardot swung his feet off the desk and almost knocked over his second glass of pernod. He stood up and pushed forward his chair for Madame Chardin. She was tall, fair-haired, and had changed into a close-fitting green gown for the evening. She looked resolute but frightened. A good ten years younger than her husband, thought Pardot, and a very beautiful woman. In his hand the inspector carried her white ski-jacket. He handed it to Pardot. It was a good stout jacket lined with sheep's wool.

"I have questioned everyone, monsieur. But there is no doubt. In the pocket of this jacket is a revolver with one shot fired."

Pardot took the gun from the pocket of the jacket with his handkerchief. "It is your gun, madame?" he asked.

"I have never seen it in my life before, monsieur." Her voice was low and attractive but there was an unmistakeable note of anxiety in it.

"You have arrested her?" asked Pardot of the inspector.

"Not yet, monsieur, but surely it is obvious. She herself frankly admits a possible motive. She had asked her husband for a divorce but he had refused. Captain Paul Bonet confirmed that he had heard them quarreling violently."

"Is it because of Captain Bonet that you wish a divorce, madame?" asked Pardot.

"He would like it to be so, monsieur — but I love another man who is at the moment in Paris."

Pardot turned to the inspector. "What about Captain Bonet's movements?"

"He has been in bed all day with stomach pains. Madame Chardin was with him for a while this morning. But she herself admits that she went out skiing alone this afternoon. Cap-

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tain Bonet kept to his room, sleeping. But we have only his word for this."

"And the student from Paris with his girl friend?"

"They have visited the cathedral, monsieur. They arrived back on the bus just before you returned. There is no mystery, monsieur — Madame was just too impulsive and too unlucky."

Pardot shook his head. "*Au contraire*, monsieur, Madame Chardin did not murder her husband. It was done by someone of the same height and build . . . someone tall and slim, like Captain Bonet for example."

Pardot tipped the cigarette ends he had found onto the desk.

"Someone who collected her used cigarettes from the hotel ashtrays and put them under the pines . . . someone who went into her room while she was bathing before dinner and put a revolver into the pocket of her ski-jacket . . . someone who would be glad for her husband to be dead and would have no pity for her if she suffered for the crime."

The inspector frowned. "But you saw her, monsieur!"

"I saw someone wearing a white jacket, true. But hers is not the only white jacket in the hotel." Pardot smiled. "This I might not have known — except for the fact that it has puzzled me why madame should reach *inside* her jacket for a revolver when the pockets are on the *outside*."

As he finished speaking he reached out and took Monsieur Mendel's navy-blue jacket from the door. He turned it quickly inside out and slipped it on. "Observe, my dear inspector, the sheep's-wool lining now makes it a white jacket — and the pockets are also inside. No, no, monsieur —" His hand came up holding the revolver as Monsieur Mendel made a rapid movement towards the door. "Remember there are five more bullets in the chamber."

Monsieur Mendel backed away from the door. Slowly he regained control of himself.

"That's better, monsieur," said Pardot. "You will see, inspector, that he is the same height and build as Madame Chardin. He also wears black trousers, and a red cap is easy to find. Oh, and so clever too . . . a little powder in Captain Bonet's food to make him ill so that madame would be sure to go out alone. Correct, Monsieur Mendel?"

The innkeeper, very stiff and still, only his face working with emotion, said harshly, "Correct, monsieur. But I do not regret killing him. For years he had been blackmailing me for a sin of my past."

Pardot shrugged his shoulders. Then he turned to Madame Chardin. "Madame, allow me to take you to your room."

She gave him a little nod and took his arm.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HENRY SLESAR**

TITLE: ***A Trip to Florida***

TYPE: Detective Story

PROTAGONIST: Mr. Godolphson

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *About Mr. Godolphson and his pawnshop and The Man in the Tight Raincoat . . . a warm and appealing story, with flashing insights and a sense of sharply observed detail.*

THE BELL BOBBED ON THE SPRING inside the doorway of Godolphson's Pawn Shop, and the pleasant tinkling sound brought a smile to Mr. Weinbaum's plump, flushed face as he entered. The shop was empty, and Mr. Weinbaum's smile broadened mischievously as he called out.

"Hey, Mr. Godolphson! You got a robber in the store!"

There was a faint chuckle from the rear, and Mr. Weinbaum moved over to the cluster of mandolins and guitars in the corner of the dim room, plucking a Chassidic melody with some skill on a brown-and-white instrument labeled *Hawaiian, $25.00*. When Mr. Godolphson came out, he was wiping his hands on a dishcloth, and his lips were curved in a smile that extended almost to the rims of his eyeglasses.

"So steal," he said cheerfully. "I'm insured." He leaned over the counter and flicked the cloth at his friend. "Hey, Toscanini. You think I'm running a music school?"

Mr. Weinbaum laughed. "Not such a bad idea. Listen, it's Wednesday. A little pinochle tonight?"

Morris Godolphson shook his head, the smile fading from his thin, lined face. "No, Sid, not tonight. Anna's not feeling so good."

"Where's Rudy?"

"Rudy's got a class."

"What's the matter? He's not smart enough yet?" Mr. Weinbaum shrugged his shoulders. "How many years does he have to go to law school?"

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Morris bristled. "What's more important than education?"

"Work is more important! His momma is more important. His father, big dope that he is, he's more important, too."

The old man waved his hand. "Take care of your own sons, Sid. Rudy is Rudy."

"All right, all right, so Rudy is Rudy." Mr. Weinbaum leaned over the counter and grinned a feeble truce signal. "So no pinochle tonight. Maybe next week?"

"I can't tell you. Next week is inventory."

"Inventory?" Mr. Weinbaum slapped the counter. "Good! Now do me a favor, Morris. This time, make it a good job. Throw out all this junk —" he waved his hand over the room, indicating half of its cluttered contents — "get a good wholesale deal, and take a little cash for a change."

"Sid, please —"

"Please what? I'm telling you to cut your throat? Listen, Morris. In the old country, the Godolphsons were the big businessmen. But what kind of a business are you running now? Take my advice. I'll get you a good flat price, and we can clean up the place. What do you say?"

"But what kind of an inventory —"

"Inventory, shminventory!" Sid Weinbaum threw his hands in the air. "Ten-fifteen-year-old junk! You told me so yourself. Junk, Morris! Nobody buys, nobody reclaims. You could choke from the dust!"

Mr. Godolphson shook his head sadly. "Well . . . maybe you're right."

"Of course I'm right!" His friend gripped Mr. Godolphson's shoulder. "Listen, you know Abrams, the wholesaler from New Jersey? A thousand times he told me he would make you a nice deal."

Morris snorted. "Abrams? That pirate."

"Ah, why do I bother with you?" Mr. Weinbaum said disgustedly. "Abrams is an honest man. I did business with him when I had a shop. Fortunes I can't promise you. But, believe me, a couple of dollars wouldn't be so bad now, right? You could take Anna to Florida, like you been promising so many years —"

"No," said Mr. Godolphson, with a hint of stubbornness. "Anna wouldn't go to Florida now. Rudy needs money, too. His law practice —"

"Rudy?" Mr. Weinbaum held his head with exaggerated despair. "Think of yourself sometime, Morris!"

Morris looked thoughtful. "Listen, Sid. Would *you* call Abrams? I don't want to give him the satisfaction —"

"All right. I'll call him next week, after inventory. You make a list of the old junk, and we'll get together on the price."

"What do you mean, we? You getting commission now?"

"Don't be so smart." Mr. Weinbaum slapped his friend on the arm affectionately. "Okay, so say hello to Anna for me. Maybe we have a little game on the weekend."

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Mr. Godolphson smiled wanly. "Yeah," he said. "If I live . . ."

It was an hour before closing and a week after inventory when the man in the tight raincoat came into the shop. He was chewing methodically on something in his mouth, and his face was half shadowed by the brim of his pearl-gray hat. Mr. Godolphson was washing the dust from his old hands at the rust-spotted sink in the rear of the store.

When Morris came out front, the man was looking around, his shaded eyes probing through the conglomeration of articles under the glass top of the counter.

"Yes?" said Morris. "What can I do for you?"

The man regarded the pawnbroker blankly for a full five seconds before he spoke. "I want t-to ask you a question," he said. The slight stammer in his speech was void of embarrassment.

"Shoot," Morris said.

"What if a guy — I mean a g-guy pawned something here and lost the t-ticket? I mean the claim check, you know."

Morris nodded. "Sure, I know what you mean. What's your name?" He went to the black ledger on the side of the counter.

"I don't know the n-name," the man said. "It was a f-friend of mine, see? He was using a different name at the t-time, if you know what I mean. He was f-funny that way."

Morris scratched his head. "Funny is right," he said pleasantly. "Well, what can I say? You know at least what was pawned?"

"Yeah." The man reached into his coat and withdrew a crumpled pack of cigarettes. He took out the only remaining cigarette, spat whatever he had been chewing into the emptied pack, and clenched the pack into a ball. He placed the ball carefully on the counter and struck a match. The flare revealed a face so scarred and pockmarked that Mr. Godolphson involuntarily looked away.

"It was a g-gun," the man said. "A .38 automatic. It was quite a few years ago. Maybe you sold it by now."

Morris smiled with recollection. "Don't worry," he said. "I won't have trouble looking that one up. I only got one gun like it in the place. Guns are not my specialty."

"Then you didn't s-sell it?"

"Who would buy? An old thing like that?" He frowned suddenly. "What am I saying? Sure I sold it. I sold it last week."

The man leaned forward. "Last week? Who to?"

"Mr. Abrams. A wholesale man from New Jersey. The gun he didn't want, you understand. The gun's not worth a nickel. But it was a deal, you see?"

The man's voice was harsh. "What do you mean, a deal?"

"A wholesale deal. Like a job lot, you know what I mean? He's taking half of my inventory."

The man puffed silently on his cigarette. "S-so where's the gun now?"

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"In my shop."

"What?"

"Sure, I still got everything. This weekend he comes with the truck. Mr. Abrams."

"I see." The man drummed his fingers on the countertop, looking around at the hanging articles of the pawnshop. "How m-much for the gun?"

"What's that?"

"How much?"

Morris spread his hands. "You don't understand," he said gently. "I can't sell this gun. It belongs to Mr. Abrams now."

"He won't miss it. I'll give you fifty bucks for it."

Morris rolled his eyes humorously. "Fifty dollars! Mister, you should have come in last week, I would have kissed you. Now —" He lifted his narrow shoulders. "Now, it's too late."

"Seventy-five," the man said.

"Make it a thousand, a million," said Mr. Godolphson ruefully. "A deal is a deal. But listen, I can give you a good price on a Luger —"

"I want the .38," the man said coldly. "Don't you get it, Pop? I don't want any other g-gun."

Mr. Godolphson suddenly felt chilled. His hands flattened on the counter as he leaned back and looked intently at his visitor. He shrugged again, helplessly.

"Look, mister, I can't help you. Believe me, I could use the money —"

The man in the tight raincoat took the cigarette from his mouth and stared intently at the pawnbroker. Then his left hand darted out and closed around Morris's wrist. He held it tightly, and they locked eyes without speaking. His right hand moved slowly forward, still grasping the lit cigarette, the glowing ash beginning to descend toward the back of the old man's hand.

"Look, Pop . . ." the stranger said.

The bell jangled.

"Hey, Mr. Rockefeller!"

The man in the tight raincoat released Mr. Godolphson's wrist as Mr. Weinbaum entered. He mumbled something angrily, glared at the pawnbroker, and turned toward the doorway.

"I'll see you later . . ."

Mr. Weinbaum watched his departure, then looked at his friend. "More business? You're getting to be a regular millionaire, Morris." Then he saw the look on Mr. Godolphson's face. "Hey, what's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Morris in an odd voice. "A funny one, that's all."

"What do you mean, a funny one?"

"Nothing, nothing."

"Look!" Mr. Weinbaum's cheeks reddened. "Something's fishy here. What was it? A stickup?"

"No, no." Morris lifted a trembling hand to his forehead. "A customer. He wanted a gun — that old .38 I got. A piece of junk. Abrams bought it —"

"So what's the fuss? From Abrams he can buy it!"

"Yes, sure, I told him. Listen, I

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think maybe I'll close up the shop now."

"It's only 4:30." Mr. Weinbaum's face was curious. "Monkey business, huh? Where did you get that gun?"

"I don't remember. It's years — seven, eight years. Who knows?"

"You couldn't look it up?"

"Records I keep only six years — that is the law."

Mr. Weinbaum nodded. "So forget it. Go home, eat a good hot meal, and set up the card table. Tonight," he said, waggling a finger at his friend, "you get a good beating."

"Yes, that's right," the pawnbroker said absently. "I'll just wash my hands . . ."

Mr. Godolphson took the subway home, and was grateful this night for the warm press of bodies in the Bronx Express. There was a chill in the late September air, but it was more the warmth of human presence that he sought. He rubbed his bony wrist reflectively, recalling with a shudder the icy clasp of the man in the tight raincoat. A funny one, all right . . .

Anna was in the kitchen when he arrived, her slippers flapping on the linoleum.

"Should you be up?" he asked, creasing his forehead. She raised her fleshy shoulder.

"I don't feel better in bed. You bought candles?"

"I bought candles." He put the paper bag on the kitchen table, along with the newspaper he had purchased in the subway station. He sat down on a chrome-legged chair and removed his shoes with a painful groan. He sighed heavily, picked up the newspaper, and walked on his heels into the living room.

Anna stirred the pot on the stove, pushing around the plump chicken parts, and taking a dainty taste every now and then. Finally satisfied, she replaced the lid on the pot, and joined her husband; her stiff fingers folded under a spotlessly clean apron.

"Well," she said, smiling faintly. "Who killed who?"

"Same old news," he answered. He peered at her over the edge of the paper. "Sid is coming up tonight."

"It's only Tuesday."

"Well, tomorrow night is holiday." He put down the paper and looked at her fondly. "Look, Anna, I've been thinking about the money from Abrams —"

"Don't think so much."

"It's almost five hundred dollars. In a couple of months it's winter already. For five hundred dollars —"

"Ah! Mr. Millionaire!" She chuckled and sat down beside the cloth-covered dining table, on which they never ate. "For five hundred dollars we should go to Florida?"

"So we have to stay at the Ritz? We can take a little apartment near the beach —"

"My big businessman! In Florida, five hundred dollars goes like water."

"Well . . ." He stirred uncomfortably. "What I was thinking that maybe *you* . . ."

"Oh, no!" She slapped the table

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with decision. "Alone to Florida I'm not going, Morris. Better Rudy should use the money later for some office furniture. Then some day, if I live, when you sell the business like Sid . . ."

"Sid could afford to sell the business. Sid's got two boys making good money."

"So what?" His wife set her face belligerently. "You think Rudy won't make good money some day? You think Sid's boys are such successes? A butcher! A salesman! Listen, when Rudy becomes a judge —"

"All right, all right, momma!" Mr. Godolphson laughed, and hid behind the newspaper in mock defense. "Don't shoot. I give up!"

"Ah! You!" She waved her hands at him in good-natured despair. "Come to the kitchen already. Big shot . . ."

Mr. Weinbaum showed up an hour after dinner. He was in high spirits, and chatted endlessly about his boys and his own retired activities. But when Mrs. Godolphson excused herself and left for the comfort of her bed, his face suddenly changed and he leaned forward earnestly towards his friend.

"Morris listen. You saw the paper tonight?"

"Sure, I saw the paper. What about it?"

"It's a funny thing." He rose and walked toward the doorway quietly, listening for the sounds of Anna's breathing. When he came back, he was mopping his brow. "I was thinking about that man — you know, the one in the raincoat tonight —"

"What about him?" Morris's throat tightened.

"I'm telling you. I was thinking about him, and what you said, and tonight, when I'm coming home, I bought a paper at the newsstand on the corner —"

Morris clucked with exasperation. "All right, all right. So what about him?"

"Let me talk! I was reading the paper at supper, and what do I read about? Here, let me show you." He took the paper from the armchair and riffled through it hurriedly. "Here, read, page two —"

Mr. Godolphson fumbled in his pocket for his reading glasses, but his friend snatched the paper back impatiently. He read the headline aloud in a halting voice: *Jordan Retrial Set for December. Defense Promises New Clue to Murder Weapon.*

"So what?"

"What do you mean, so what? You read the story?"

"I read it before supper."

"And you couldn't put two and two together? This Jordan, you know who he is? He's a man they arrested seven, eight years ago for killing a paymaster. *But they never found the gun.* You understand? Now they got some new evidence, so this Jordan gets another trial."

"Yeah, so —"

"So let me finish. If this Jordan is really *innocent*, then the real crooks are getting worried, see?"

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Mr. Godolphson nodded blankly.

"And what are they worried about? The gun! The gun that killed the paymaster. And what kind of a gun? A .38 automatic. And when did the gun disappear? Seven, eight years ago . . . So what are you staring at?"

"I — I don't know. Sid, you mean —"

"Of course I mean! Listen, this man in the raincoat — why does he want this gun of yours so bad?"

Mr. Godolphson stood up, his head moving slowly from side to side. "That's a terrible thing," he said softly. "A terrible thing . . ."

"Listen, Morris." His friend caught his arm. "Don't get mixed up in this business. Better you should call the police —"

"The police?" Mr. Godolphson's voice was horrified. "For what? Sid, you're talking crazy. What kind of proof is it? A man wants to buy a gun. So what? It's not permitted? He's got a license, he can carry a gun."

"What if he's a gangster? A crook?" Mr. Weinbaum's voice rose. "*A murderer?*"

The telephone rang.

The two men stared at it, suddenly frightened by the familiar sound. It rang three times while they stood unmoving.

"Morris!" His wife called out from the bedroom.

"What?"

"The telephone. You going to let it ring all night?"

Mr. Godolphson started for it numbly. "It's probably Rudy," he mumbled. He lifted the receiver.

"Hello?"

"Godolphson?"

"Yes?"

"From the p-pawnshop?"

"Yes, that's right."

The pawnbroker's hands whitened on the receiver. His other hand reached out and gripped the telephone table for support.

"Who — who is this?"

"I was in your place t-tonight. About that .38 automatic. Remember?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Listen, and listen close. I n-need that gun, you understand? I mean, my f-friend wants it real bad. I'm sure we can make a deal. How about it?"

"Listen, I'm sorry, but I told you before —"

"We'll make it a hundred bucks, okay? What do you s-say, Pop? Easy money. No fuss, no trouble."

"I really can't —"

There was an ominous pause. "I'll t-tell you what I'll do, Pop. I'll come to your place t-tomorrow morning. What time do you open?"

"Eight thirty. But listen —"

"I'll be there at 8:30. We'll talk this over some more. After all, no use m-making a big thing outa this, huh? I mean, you don't want any t-trouble, do you?"

Mr. Godolphson's knees buckled. His friend came toward him with a look of alarm, but the pawnbroker waved him back and straightened up.

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"Now, look," he said, with an effort of sternness. "If you want the gun so bad, you can buy it from Abrams. In New Jersey."

"I never go t-to Jersey, Pop. I'd rather get the gun from you. So listen. I'll come in t-tomorrow morning at eight thirty. You give me the g-gun, or I'll —"

The old man slapped his hand over the receiver of the telephone as he listened to the next words. His thin faced paled, and his hand was shaking as he lifted it from the mouthpiece.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I understand. Only give me a minute —"

"Morris!" Mr. Weinbaum's eyes widened. "Should I call the —" His friend gestured "no," frantically.

"Yes, I know," Mr. Godolphson said. "Only tomorrow is too soon, you know what I mean? It's in the basement. The gun. It'll take me a whole day to find it. You understand? Come the day after. Yes, on Thursday."

Anna Godolphson suddenly appeared at the doorway of the bedroom, a housecoat wrapped around her and looking at the two men curiously.

"What is it?" she said. "Who's on the phone?"

"Shh!" Morris pushed her back with his eyes. "Yes, mister, I know what you said. Only make it Thursday. Yes, that's right. At eight thirty. Yes, I understand . . . Goodbye!" He slammed the receiver down, then leaned on the instrument with his eyes closed.

"Morris, what is it?"

"Nothing, Anna. Go back to bed."

"Morris —" Mr. Weinbaum stabbed furiously at his moist forehead with a handkerchief. "It was *him?*"

"Him? What him?" asked Mrs. Godolphson.

"Anna, please. It was only a business deal — a customer."

Mrs. Godolphson looked at him suspiciously, then shrugged. "All right. So it's a customer." She yawned, and padded back into the bedroom.

Mr. Godolphson returned to his chair. When he sat down, he covered his white face with his hands. His friend touched him lightly on the back.

"Morris . . ."

The pawnbroker shook his head. "Nothing . . ."

"Maybe the police —"

Mr. Godolphson lifted his eyes, and his friend started at the misery he read there. "No police," he said hollowly. "Better I should give him the gun."

"But Morris!"

The old man looked towards the bedroom. "Me he didn't threaten, Sid. You understand? Me, he didn't . . ."

Mr. Godolphson awoke early on Thursday morning. The sky was still dark, and Anna slept heavily by his side. In the kitchen, the candles flickered like ghostly lights.

He dressed noiselessly and tiptoed

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across the bedroom. The clock in the kitchen said six thirty.

There was some coffee in the small pot on the stove. He heated it, and poured the boiling black fluid into a glass tumbler. He sat at the kitchen table and stared at the coffee gloomily. When he heard the sounds of Anna stirring in the bedroom, he got up, poured the untouched coffee down the sink, and left the house.

The streets were empty as he emerged from the subway exit into the daylight. There was a playful wind skipping along the sidewalk in front of his pawnshop, sending flutters of debris across the entrance. He would have to sweep it up, of course, but not now, later . . .

He turned the key in the lock and pushed the door open. The bell jangled cheerfully.

The morning sun had made few encroachments in the shop, so he turned on the lights and even snapped on the curved lamp squatting on the counter. He rang the cash register absently, and automatically felt inside for stray coins. There were none. He closed the drawer, slowly removed his topcoat and suit jacket, and took them to the hangers in the rear of the shop. Then he washed his hands, and was ready for business.

At 8:30 sharp, the bell bobbed on the spring, and the man in the tight raincoat walked in.

He darted a shrewd glance around the shop, and Mr. Godolphson knew that he had surveyed the street outside as well. The wide brim of his gray hat was pulled even lower over his eyes, but the shadow failed to hide his heavy-breathing mouth.

"Godolphson?"

The pawnbroker nodded sadly. "I'm here."

The man stood in front of the counter, planting his legs wide apart and firm. "It's Thursday," he said.

"I know. Thursday."

"You got the g-gun?"

"The gun is here."

The hard face relaxed. "Good. Let's have it."

"Yes. Of course." Mr. Godolphson reached behind the counter and came out with a cardboard packing box that bore the red signature of a soup company. There was an appalling jumble of miscellaneous objects inside.

"It's some place in here," he said.

"Fish it out," the man told him.

Mr. Godolphson fished. He brought out a battered cuckoo clock, and looked at it appraisingly. He produced a wickless cigarette lighter and flicked the wheel aimlessly. He removed a pair of binoculars, blew the dust from the lenses, and placed them carefully on the counter. He pulled out a tarnished coin-changer and jingled the lever experimentally.

"All right, come on!" The man's voice, in anger, was clear and unstammering. "Let's get with it, Pop. I ain't got all day!"

"It's here, I know. Give me just a minute."

He fished again. This time he came up with the gun.

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"Give it to me!"

Mr. Godolphson passed the weapon over the counter. The man snatched it greedily. But before he could hide it under his raincoat, the bell jangled at the door, and the sound spun the man's head toward the entrance. He squawked loudly at the sight of the uniformed figure that came in.

"Hey, what's goin' on here?" asked the policeman.

"Cop!" the man cried. He looked wildly at the officer, and then at the frightened old man behind the counter.

"Officer Santelli —" Mr. Godolphson began.

"I saw your lights, Mr. Godolphson, and I thought — hey, you!"

The policeman spotted the gun in the man's hand. His reaction was instantaneous. His arm snaked out and the flat of his hand struck the man's wrist, hard. The gun clattered to the floor, and the man lowered his head and tried to bulldoze his way toward freedom. But Santelli was too young, too strong, and too confirmed in his duty to allow the onslaught to throw him off balance. His big foot went out quickly, and the man stumbled and fell against a hanging arbor of musical instruments. They jangled and thrummed as he grasped at them in an effort to regain his footing. He cursed loudly, and the officer promptly grabbed one of the man's arms from behind and pinned it in an expert half-nelson.

"What is it, Mr. Godolphson?" Santelli turned his head. "Stickup?"

"No!" Mr. Godolphson came around the counter, his fears now completely gone. "He wanted that gun — that .38 automatic. I think it's the gun from this Jordan business —"

"Jordan?" The officer grunted. "Now that would *really* be something! Come on, you —" Santelli produced his service revolver, and the man stopped struggling. He pushed open the door and blew a shrill note on his whistle.

"We'll have this bum out of here in no time, Mr. Godolphson," Santelli promised. He smiled, pleased as a kid with the possibilities of this arrest. "You know," he said, "it's a good thing I saw the lights on in your shop, Mr. Godolphson. I mean, I knew you wouldn't be open today . . . being Yom Kippur and all . . ."

Anna was waiting in the kitchen when Mr. Godolphson got home. She looked up in surprise when he entered.

"So where were you a whole day? And on Yom Kippur? You were in synagogue maybe . . ."

"No, I wasn't, Momma." He sat down at the table and tried to keep a straight face, but the effort was beyond him. He beamed widely, the smile finally reaching to the rims of his eyeglasses.

"What's so funny? You disappear from the house for eight hours, and then you come home grinning like a cat. Hey, you, big shot, I'm talking to you!"

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"I'm listening."

"So talk! What happened to you? Did you fast today? Then come have tea . . ."

"I'll have tea later," Morris said. First, I'll tell you what happened . . ."

Mr. Godolphson told her the story. She sat open-mouthed throughout, interrupting only with mournful moans and exclamations.

"So now," Godolphson concluded, still smiling, "this Jordan gets a new trial, and with the gun they can prove that he's really an innocent man."

"So very good." Anna didn't appear too impressed. "This Jordan I don't know. But if you helped him out, God bless you. Is this why you're grinning?"

Mr. Godolphson shook his head. "No, Momma," he said. "The best is yet. The man from police headquarters wants I should come to the trial — you and me, both of us — so I can give my evidence."

Anna put her hands to her head. "And this is why you're so happy?"

"Of course!" said Mr. Godolphson. "The trial is in Fort Lauderdale, Momma. And you know where Fort Lauderdale is? It's in Florida!"

Then they had their tea in the large glasses.

NEXT MONTH . . .

A case for Dr. Gideon Fell —

JOHN DICKSON CARR's *The Incautious Burglar*

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THE ADVENTURES OF TIMOTHY TRANT

GOING . . . GOING . . . GONE!

by Q. PATRICK

"WE'RE ALMOST THERE," SAID Loretta Milton. "I came over yesterday afternoon with Mr. Hapgood to the viewing. Yes. See the sign? AUCTION. TURN HERE."

Lieutenant Trant eased his convertible into a narrow country road. Ahead of them, with a flock of cars parked in front of it, stood a charming New England house and nearby an old tobacco barn where a crowd of people were waiting for the auction to begin.

Trant was enjoying his weekend with his new friend, the mystery writer, Fred King. He had enjoyed meeting Fred's uncle, Avery Hapgood, the great art dealer. He had enjoyed reading Fred's latest manuscript, *Malice and Monkshood*, even though it had kept him up half the night. Most of all he was enjoying Loretta Milton.

Lieutenant Trant, of the New York Homicide Bureau, was more interested in murder than matrimony. Usually, he found "extra girls" on weekends millstones around his neck. But Loretta was a pleasant exception — a New York career girl who managed to be attractive and feminine instead of frightening and chic.

Trant parked the car and they went in search of their hosts who had started before them. Loretta's hand was on his arm.

"The auction's all junk — except for Mr. Hapgood's four paperweights. But you must see the picture frame I discovered. It's a wonderful Victorian monstrosity; it'll make a sensational mirror."

They found the Kings on the fringes of the crowd. Since the auction was to start at 2 and Mr. Hapgood had to make a train at 3:15, Nina King had brought a picnic lunch and was arranging it on a large blanket.

Fred King, in high spirits because Trant and Loretta had praised his novel, was opening a thermos of cocktails.

Nina smiled up from the wrapped sandwiches, pretty and delicate as the hooded flowers on her breast.

"Uncle Avery's asking the auctioneer to start with his paperweights to make sure he'll be able to bid before train time."

As she spoke, Avery Hapgood pushed through the crowd toward them, a brief case under his arm. Old and waspish, with a heart which was reportedly as weak as his shrewdness was legendary, Hapgood had reigned supreme in the art-dealing world for years. He dominated everyone around

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him like a testy old emperor, particularly his nephew and his wife who, as his only relatives and heirs, bore the full weight of his personality.

"I've just been making sure they'll put the paperweights up just after your frame, my dear," he said, and added gallantly, "though heaven knows why anyone so handsome would be seen dead with such a repulsive object. The place is crawling with dealers and decorators. All of 'em bug-eyed, trying to figure out why I'm here."

"Why don't you tell them it's just because you happen to be visiting us?" asked Nina King.

"Do them good to sweat." Hapgood gave a guffaw of laughter. "If there's a lower form of life than an earthworm, it's a decorator."

Hapgood settled himself on the blanket beside the two women with the lunch basket, accepting a sandwich from Loretta and a martini from his niece. A willowy young man with red hair and shell-rimmed glasses came up to them.

"Hello, Mr. Hapgood, didn't expect to see you here. I suppose it's those French paperweights?"

Hapgood gave a scornful grunt and introduced him. "Bernard Nelson — one of the earthworms."

The decorator forced a respectful grin. "Listen, Mr. Hapgood, I'm interested in those paperweights, too. If you start bidding, every dealer here's going to jump in and force the price way up. Why not let me buy them? Then we split — two each."

Hapgood glared at him. "My dear young man, in a long and tumultuous career I've never entrusted a purchase to anyone else. Why should I begin with you?"

"Oh, I know your method, Mr. Hapgood. I'm perfectly ready to sign a paper before the auction begins stating that two of the paperweights are being bought for you. I —"

Hapgood rumbled ominously, started to rise, and Bernard Nelson scurried away.

The auctioneer had officially opened proceedings. Trant took a sandwich from the lunch basket. It was of cold corned beef, tartly spiced with horseradish sauce. The auctioneer was banging with his gavel, and Loretta's frame came up on the block.

The frame was indeed a monstrosity, decorated with elaborate gilt curlicues which completely obliterated the vague and plumply naked woman it surrounded.

"*Darling*," exclaimed Nina, "you can't want that revolting thing. It's so unlike you."

But gleefully Loretta bid $10 and, after half-hearted competition from an elderly lady, got it for $25. She dragged Trant over to the auction block and paid.

While she went to the mobile canteen for cigarettes, Trant carried the picture to the car. As he came back, bidding on the first paperweight had started. Hapgood was bidding and three or four of the other dealers, including Bernard Nelson. The atmosphere had become suddenly charged

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with tension. But, as Trant rejoined the group, it was Avery Hapgood who held his interest.

The dealer was standing up, clutching in his plump hand the uneaten half of his sandwich still in its wax paper. His face was unnaturally red. The veins bulged on his forehead. His breath came in harsh, irregular wheezes.

"Forty-five dollars," he called.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I hear forty-five. Do I hear fifty for the rare old —"

"Fifty," bid Nelson.

"Fifty-fi —" Suddenly Avery Hapgood choked. He dropped the sandwich and passed his hand over his eyes as if he had gone blind. He swayed; then, with a wrenching gasp, he collapsed in a heap on the grass.

"Uncle! . . . Mr. Hapgood! . . . A doctor! . . . Get a doctor!"

After a moment of chaos, the local doctor was on his knees by Hapgood. The auction had broken off. Chattering people, including Bernard Nelson, crowded around. Trant's pulses were tingling. Was it possible —? He ducked and picked up the remains of Hapgood's sandwich before someone trod on it. On the covering wax paper he saw a faint penciled cross.

"Mr. King," the doctor was asking, "you say your uncle suffered from a weak heart?"

"Yes."

"I'm afraid he's dead. The excitement of the bidding. A heart attack. A —"

"Oh, no, it wasn't a heart attack." Trant turned very quietly to Fred King. "You, of all people, should have recognized the symptoms. Red face, protuberant veins, difficulty with breathing, impaired vision? Didn't you notice him act as if he was blind? What about your book, *Malice and Monkshood?* That's precisely the way you described aconite poisoning."

"Aconite!" stammered Nina King.

"Yes." Trant touched the flower on her dress. "Aconite — monkshood. That's monkshood you're wearing, isn't it?"

"Why, yes. Fred pinned it on as a gag to celebrate the book."

"So you do have aconite in the garden?"

"Of course we have, but . . ."

Trant turned back to King. "In your novel, you had the murderer disguise the bitter aconite with raw onions on steak tartar. In this case, horse-radish sauce could have made a good substitute, couldn't it? Just cut up a few pieces of the root, mix it in . . ." He indicated the remains of Hapgood's sandwich. "And a pencil mark on your uncle's sandwich wrapping to make sure he'd get the right one. Excitement of bidding brings on heart attack! The perfect murder!"

Nina King gazed at him, stricken. "You — you can't accuse Fred of murdering Uncle!"

"It's the orthodox solution, isn't it? Hapgood was a very rich man. Your husband's the only heir. But I've never been particularly fond of the orthodox. I . . ."

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He paused as Loretta Milton, coming back from the canteen, pushed her way to his side. She gave one look at the figure on the ground and cried, "His heart!" Then she whirled, and dived for the art-dealer's brief case. Trant disengaged it gently from her hand as she pawed through it.

"His pills!" Loretta protested. "They're in there!"

Trant shook his head. "Mr. Hapgood is beyond the need of pills," he said, "and though this may not seem the moment for an apology, I have one to make, Miss Milton. When I took your frame up to the car, the picture fell out. I know the picture's valueless to you, but I trod on it and . . ."

Loretta Milton's reaction to this lie was violent. Her face went paper-white. She swayed and dropped the hold she had still kept on the brief case. Trant grabbed at her arm.

"Why did Hapgood request the picture to come up for sale first when it was *he* who was taking the train — not you? Why did you want to buy the frame when Nina, your old friend, said it was completely unlike your taste? The frame and the paperweights were nothing but a blind, weren't they? It was the picture that was valuable. Hapgood recognized it when you were both here yesterday. He got you to buy it to throw the other dealers off the scent. How much did he offer you for the deal? One hundred dollars? Two? Three? Four?"

"No," gasped Loretta Milton. "No."

"Well, it shouldn't be hard to find out. Thanks to Mr. Nelson, we know Hapgood's method." Trant turned to the dead man's brief case, opened it up, and leafed through its contents. "He never entrusted a purchase to anyone else without a paper stating . . . Here we are!" He had extracted a small, folded paper from the brief case. "And I imagine this document was what you were really after, Miss Milton, when you pretended to be after the pills."

Trant read: "I, Loretta Milton, for the sum of five hundred dollars, agree to purchase for Avery Hapgood at the Redfern auction one probable Rubens canvas. It is understood that, although I am the purchaser, the property shall belong to Avery Hapgood and —"

Trant broke off. He was watching the distracted girl a trifle sadly. She had seemed so *nice*.

"Five hundred dollars! That's good pay for a simple chore, Miss Milton. But a Rubens canvas all your own! That would be much more pleasant. What would it resell for, I wonder? Fifty thousand? A hundred thousand? Certainly, once you'd read *Malice and Monkshood* it was worth the effort of digging up a monkshood root, tampering slightly with Hapgood's sandwich, and . . ."

But there was no need to go on because Loretta Milton had fainted.

Trant made a little diffident gesture toward Fred and Nina King.

"You see now why I've never been particularly fond of the orthodox solution!"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **RUFUS KING**

TITLE: ***Miami Papers Please Copy***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Miami, Florida, and environs

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The rollicking tale of what happened to Miss Violet Agnes Fitzhutt (whose father collected flutes) after she dropped a theatre ticket on the street and a stranger picked it up . . . You could have knocked us down with a feather!*

MISS VIOLET AGNES FITZHUTT was a feature writer, by her own invitation, on that otherwise excellently edited and solvent paper the *Miami Press*. Violet also was the only child of the recently widowed Colonel Eustace ("Old Faithful") Fitzhutt, for which he thanked an occasionally benevolent Providence. Any replicas of Vi would have killed him.

The Colonel was the owner of the daily and his sobriquet was in no sense one of endearment. Rather it stemmed from that hot-water convulsion of nature in Yellowstone National Park whose eruptions last for five minutes and occur at regular intervals of about an hour.

Personally, Fitzhutt considered himself a very equable and kindly man. He would have been both bewildered and shocked if anybody, to his face, had called him one of the world's outstanding human geysers. Just, shrewd, diplomatic, an amateur in the various fields of Art — such were his own flavored opinions of his character.

He was of an age (60) where he permitted himself a few harmless foibles. For example, he collected flutes, much in the manner that weaker minds went in for collecting stamps. Among many others, such as an old Egyptian nay, there were specimens made of silver, gold, cocuswood, china, and cut glass. The prize of his crop was a flute designed to be blown through the nose. As a performer on these instruments he was self-pleased with his arpeggios, both

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legato and staccato, being especially fond of his leaps, turns, and shakes, which he felt were simply terrific.

Apart from this minor form of brain fever his business acumen was solid as a rock; and when Violet pitched her latest knuckleball at him regarding her proposed new role of feature writer on the *Press*, Fitzhutt dampened a normal desire to explode and said with approximate calmness, "McGuire will blow his top." (McGuire was city editor and much too valuable a man to be subjected to Vi's whimsies.) "He won't stand for it."

"Yes, he will."

"You're crazy."

"So is he."

"Not in the same way, Vi," remarked the Colonel.

"Anyhow, it doesn't matter," said Vi. "He's in love with me."

"Does *he* know it?"

"Yes. He said so."

"When?"

"Yesterday. I decided to give him a birthday present."

"His birthday is two months from now — on the sixth of March."

"So?"

Fitzhutt sighed in the manner of a restricted whale gasping for air.

"All right. And what did you give him?"

"A silver pencil. I had it permanently magnetized."

"What for?"

"So he could pick up paper clips with it."

"Dear God!"

"He thanked me and said if he didn't love me so much he'd shove it down my throat until I choked."

"So that means he loves you?"

"Yes."

"And you?"

"I don't know. Right now it's fifty-fifty. I like his cowlick and the fact that he looks like Jimmy Stewart."

"Look, Vi, lay off him, will you? We need him around here."

"Don't worry. I'm still just thinking it over. If he ever finds out what a comb and brush are meant for the deal is off."

Violet left their Palm Island extravaganza, which encompassed a Morocco-style house of ten bedrooms, an east patio, a west patio, a formal tropical garden with a Spanish fountain that trickled like a leaky tap, a swimming pool, and a diminutive glen that Fitzhutt used as an intimate stage setting for the playing of his flutes before occasional audiences of friends coerced for the same.

She headed her convertible directly for the *Miami Press* Building which towered on Flagler, parked, and then headed just as directly for McGuire's office. Fitzhutt had been perfectly correct, and McGuire received the impact of Violet's intentions with the pleasurable anticipation of an impending visit to a dentist. He took three therapeutic breaths.

"Violet, sit down."

"Thank you, McGuire. You don't look entirely pleased."

"I am neither pleased nor displeased. I am resigned. I suppose Old

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Fai — uh — I suppose your father has given his okay to this — to this this?"

"Of course."

"Ah, yes. Of course."

"For my first feature article I'll need two seats on the aisle tonight for that show that's playing at the Little Theatre. I think they've got Gilda Hepwood this week. It's a stinker, or something. One of those morality plays like *Pass That Third Floor Back*."

"In the newspaper business, Miss Fitzhutt, we do not think. We know. The vehicle for Miss Hepwood is a problem play dealing with mother love. It's title is *The Weaker Link*. It has already been adequately reviewed by Nickerson and we need a feature article on it about as badly as we need a stuffed sailfish — or, I might add, a magnetized pencil with which to pick up paper clips."

"You might send a boy over for the tickets now, dear."

"Don't call me dear."

"And it was only yesterday you said you loved me."

"Only yesterday is right. You can pick the seats up tonight at the box office."

"I want them here and I want them now."

"Why?"

"Because I am going to drop one of the tickets out on the street."

Violet waited in the building doorway until a passing sunshower decided to call it quits and then stepped out onto Flagler. The usual assortment of strawberry-colored tourists, pale local shoppers, natives, and drifters dawdled along, and Violet dawdled with them. On the corner, waiting with a group for the traffic signal to turn green, she let drop from her hand the ticket for seat Number 1, Row D, Left. She did this as the light changed and people moved forward to cross. She walked right on, not looking back, making not effort to see who picked up the ticket, or if it were picked up at all. She got her car from the *Press* parking lot and drove home.

Towards evening she dressed with care, selecting a Lincoln Road number in flamingo taffeta with a tiered tulle skirt of waltz length, and softening her hairdo into a sweetly ingenuous horsetail.

Fitzhutt said to her across the dinner table, "You will undoubtedly find yourself sitting beside a poverty-stricken refugee from Newark."

"You've been talking with McGuire."

"I have, and he is in complete rapport with me that what you need most in life is a padded cell."

"I told you he loved me."

"Then he has a most peculiar way of expressing it. Might I ask, as a mere bystander-father, just how far are you going with this clambake?"

"Until I get my story."

Fitzhutt wiped a fleck of stone crab from his chin.

"Very well, my dear. I shall have bail ready."

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Violet sat through the first act of *The Weaker Link* beside an empty aisle seat. She had been reportorially alert for anyone from an old petit-point enthusiast in a Mother Hubbard to a milk route salesman — but for vacancy, no. With the end of the intermission and the rise of the curtain on Act Two she considered using a phantasmal seat-neighbor and was giving the notion the broom as being too cute when the man came.

He examined her frankly both before and after he sat down, and Violet did some expert sidelong sizing-up herself. He was elderly, with wholesomely distinguished gray hair, well dressed, and an intelligent, kindly face that seemed tinged with a subtle sadness. The fatherly type, but not genus Fitzhutt. She thought: Nuts. The feature article is going to be a dud.

During the act the man did two things. He coughed once behind fingers on one of which was a valuable star sapphire in a platinum mount, and at the conclusion of one of Miss Hepwood's more poignant scenes he dabbed a handkerchief beneath an eye. Oh, Mother, thought Violet; will this poached egg be dropped into the ashcan, and I ain't whistling Dixie.

She couldn't have been more wrong.

When the house lights went up for the second intermission, the man turned to her and said, "Did you find one, too? A ticket, I mean. Lying on the street."

"Yes, I did."

"I thought as much. Otherwise you wouldn't have come here unescorted. I daresay you've used the ticket as a lark. My name is Ashton Coldbrace."

"I," Violet said, "am Virginia Lake."

"Miss?"

"Miss."

"I, too," Coldbrace said with an interpolated sigh, "am unwed. In all this world, Miss Lake, I find myself alone. My last family relative, a sister, suffered a cerebral hemorrhage last August. She died on the tenth."

"You must miss her very much."

"I do. Since laying her at rest in the Garden of Peace at DeSoto Springs my life has been a void."

The curtain rose on Act Three. During it Coldbrace used his handkerchief several times for eye-dabbing, doing what amounted to a swab job at the final curtain when Miss Hepwood stood by a parapet of her British castle and, employing a tragic gaze across some dreary handpainted moors, murmured heartbrokenly, "My son, my son — like England's you have set."

Following this bit of prize corn, Coldbrace said, "Miss Lake, I have the temerity to suggest that you have supper with me. I've not eaten a thing all day. I couldn't. But this entire evening — the play — our chance meeting — you — all have worked a miracle. Please don't deny me the pleasure, Miss Lake?"

Violet hadn't the remotest inten-

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tion of doing so. Evidently there was a story in this courteous stranger and his gentle grief.

It began to interest her keenly what this grief might be. Surely not the dead sister — August? The tenth? That was about six months ago. With a child, perhaps, the sorrow might have lingered in its dripping stage, but surely not with a normally balanced, well-bred man like Mr. Coldbrace. What then was it?

Over a boiled lobster and a good Rhine wine in the Sand Bar room of the Hotel Surf he told her.

"I had every intention, when I set out this evening, Miss Lake, of taking my own life."

Sharp journalistic instinct combatted a more human flash of pity.

Violet said, "Why?"

"To explain that, I would have to show you something. Then I think you would understand."

"Am I right, Mr. Coldbrace, in believing that you have given up your intention?"

"Completely. Life again means something to me, thanks to this evening . . . thanks to you."

"What is this object I should see? A photograph, perhaps?"

"No. It is a box. Primarily, I must add, the contents of the box."

"Letters?"

Coldbrace leaned across the small table and looked at Violet pleadingly.

"Will you do something further for me? I'm living aboard my boat. Will you come with me to the basin? The box is there."

Coldbrace's boat, *Sargasso II*, a 36-footer — completely pushbutton and a luxury craft if ever there was one — was manned by a well-salted character addressed as Captain Nord, and a Filipino steward, Narciso, whose sibilants went unhissed. Also, Narciso was of the smiling type.

Violet preceded Coldbrace into a cabin beautifully outfitted in mahogany veneers and taupe-toned leather. He said to Narciso, "Two Screwdrivers," and explained to Violet that they were a tall orange juice and ice with a jigger of vodka.

"Very refreshing, Miss Lake, and quite mild. I think of Japanese lanterns while sipping them — that and white-frosted angel cake."

Violet failed to follow, but she supposed that Coldbrace was remembering some garden parties of his youth. He went to a record player and put on a volume of Strauss waltzes, turning them up rather loud. Under ordinary circumstances she would have told him to knock it off, but the circumstances weren't ordinary. To all purposes she had restored a would-be suicide to life. Practically he was her responsibility, and if he wanted to blast their ears off with tree trunks from the Vienna woods to regain his emotional balance, Violet was all for it.

It took Narciso about ten minutes to mix the Screwdrivers. He served them and left the cabin, closing the door. Coldbrace went to a bulkhead cabinet and took out an oblong leather box. He turned Strauss down

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to a whisper and said to Violet, "This is the box, Miss Lake."

Violet prepared herself to be properly starry-eyed over, say, crushed violets, love letters, or faded locks of hair. She was not prepared, when she lifed the lid, for the sight of a dead-black Colt automatic, caliber .45. After the romantic buildup of hearts and flowers, the shock was truly one right on the button. She had no fear of guns and was efficiently familiar with them, but she wanted to get rid of this particularly deadly-looking specimen right away.

She held the box out and said, "Here."

Coldbrace took it and several things happened. The needle flew across Strauss grooves with a screech, *Sargasso II* smacked its first sea and gave a lurch, and Coldbrace removed the gun from the leather box, unlatched its safety catch, and aimed its muzzle dead-center at Violet's Lincoln Road bodice.

"We're moving!" Violet announced rather needlessly.

"Yes, Miss Fitzhutt."

"And you're pointing that thing at my stomach."

"Approximately."

"And you know my right name."

"Your general summation is admirable. As a newspaper woman you should go far."

"Look, Mr. Coldbrace — if it is Coldbrace, which I now doubt — I'm willing to play along with a gag as far as the best of them, but if there are bullets in that gun, veer it, will you? I suppose McGuire put you up to this."

"I know no Mr. McGuire. Your fiancé, perhaps?"

"Perhaps not. I suppose you blasted the volume up on that machine so I wouldn't hear the motors starting."

"Of course."

"Very smart. And now look, buster, I want out. Tell that Captain Smorgasbord of yours to turn this trap around and head back for the dock."

Coldbrace iced, definitely losing his fatherly look.

"This is not a gag, Miss Fitzhutt, and if I have the slightest trouble with you I shall pump you full of lead. You will bleed profusely, and the sharks or the barracudas will take care of the rest."

Some of Coldbrace's ice spread over Violet in the form of a good sharp chill.

"I think I actually believe you."

"You are a wise woman to do so."

"But I simply don't get it. Did you see me drop the ticket?"

"I did. I saw you purposely drop it."

"And you knew me?"

"Your face is familiar to many Miamians from its frequent appearance in the paper. In any case, I had you down on my list."

"On what list?"

"As a profitably desirable person to kidnap."

"Ransom?"

"Obviously."

"You, Mr. Coldbrace, have flipped your wig. My father would pay

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you, yes — but to keep me in confinement on a yearly basis."

"Very amusing. But I prefer to belive otherwise."

"Do I rate handcuffs and ankle shackles, too?"

"If you stupidly indulge in violence, yes. Let me again remind you that this is not a game. This isn't one of your swim parties on the beach. There is no escape when at sea. Once more I call your attention to the barracudas and the sharks. As you know very well, Miss Fitzhutt, these waters are infested with them. They are your shackles and your chains."

Violet had one trait strongly inherited from her father: when faced by a stone wall she did not bash her head against it; she looked for a pogo stick instead. She studied Coldbrace with eyes that were anything but ingenuous and concluded, first, that he was unadulterated poison, and, second, that McGuire, the creep, had had no finger in this cash-looting pie.

Parking the barracudas and the sharks off to one side, she felt no sense of danger threatening her person, and certainly none towards her maidenly honor, as Coldbrace positively was not out of Peter Arno. And yet — didn't they, for kidnaping, give the kidnaper the electric chair? Wasn't that why in so many cases the kidnaper, after thriftily tucking the ransom money in his piggy bank, eliminated any future first-person-singular squawks on the part of his victim?

"And just how," Violet asked, "do you intend to get in touch with papa? Ship-to-shore radio telephone?"

Fitzhutt looked at her with clammy pity.

"As a criminal, Miss Fitzhutt, the peak of your career would be the lifting of a plastic earring from a five-and-ten-cent store. There is such a thing as the coast guard, you know. Also, you know, a radio signal can be pinpointed by triangulation and —"

"Yes, I do know. Skip it. Well, what?"

"The shore end of this project lies in the capable hands of my confrère, a lady professionally known as Liz the Fleece."

"Not your dead sister, I presume?"

"Unhappily, no. She is my live wife. I regret that she could not have been aboard to greet you."

"And so do I. No doubt papa will enjoy her tremendously. My bet is he will hospitably sock her teeth out with one of his flutes."

"Miss Fitzhutt, pleasant though you seem to find it, you must drop this wishful dreaming. I am a man of infinite caution, patience, and care."

"All right, so your mother was frightened by a detail."

"Put it any way you wish, but the fact remains that nothing whatever will go wrong. We shall reach Pimento Atoll — a secluded small paradise I own — late this morning, and from then on you and I and *Sargasso II* will have vanished until the deal reaches its successful conclusion."

"Just how fat a slice do you expect to trim off papa?"

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"For him, a bagatelle. Three hundred thousand."

"The only thing he'd drop that sort of dough for would be a box seat to watch you fry."

"Miss Fitzhutt, please remember one thing: you are dealing with an expert."

Coldbrace stood up, which was a mistake because *Sargasso II* selected that particular moment for executing an old step from the schottische which threw him flat on his face. The gun flew from his sapphire-bedizened fingers and clattered down at Violet's feet. She picked it up. Coldbrace picked himself up.

Being nobody's fool, Violet snapped back the automatic's sleeve. No bullet was ejected. She slid it back again. No bullet.

"This thing," she announced candidly, "isn't loaded."

"So sorry," Narciso's Filipino voice giggled from the doorway, "but this one is."

"Nice work, Narciso," Coldbrace said.

Narciso made a sound like a whistling teakettle.

"Much trouble, sir!"

"Well? Why are we off our course? What caused that lurch?"

"This, sir."

Narciso, getting a good clutch on a shirt collar, dragged in a man.

"Who is it?"

"A stowaway, sir. Captain spy him, then both hit each other on heads. Very exciting. Both gentlemen pass out."

"That," Violet said to Coldbrace, "that unpacked dufflebag with the cowlick is Mr. McGuire. Is he dead?"

"Not yet. What about the captain, Narciso? Why are we wallowing beamside like this?"

"Captain is limp. Perfect egg, sir, on top of his head."

"Miss Fitzhutt, I am going to lock you in here with this meddling fly while I get us back on our course. Narciso, come with me."

Violet, alone with her city editor, noticed that his eyes had opened. He seemed to be gazing at her dreamily.

"If Florence Nightingale had had your blood," he said, "she'd have been guilty of pernicious anemia. Why didn't you pull the trigger on that gun?"

Violet pulled it.

"Stop, you idiot, you're pointing it at me!"

"It isn't loaded."

"That's what they always say." McGuire got to his feet only to be thrown back upon a settee. "I might have been dying for all you cared."

"Cut the string section, McGuire, and tell me what you are so brilliantly doing here. Or better still, let me in on where are the Marines?"

"For all I know they are still in their barracks at Opa-Locka."

"Fine — that's just fine."

"I have not, Miss Fitzhutt, been entirely idle."

"Apart from your game of beanbags with the captain, just what?"

"That, I trust, we shall see. First we must barricade that door."

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"To make it absolutely certain we can't get out?"

"To prevent their coming in."

"This is not the moment, McGuire, to promote your flair for the melodramatic. Restrain yourself."

"I suggest that you come to your senses, such as they are, and help me find a rope."

"One won't be necessary."

"A rope," McGuire said acidly, "to lash that door shut. Because when they get wise to what I've done they'll kill us."

Upon stepping out on deck with Narciso, Coldbrace found the night not only moonless but positively black. Not a star showed in the sable bombazine of sky.

"One of those," he said, his nostrils moist from the thick overcast.

"Much like subway, sir. With blown fuse."

"I suppose we've been waltzing in circles ever since Captain Nord was knocked out. A good thing we don't travel the regular lanes."

"Most gratifying, sir. Other vessels would not be caught on this course with their binnacles down."

This enlightening flurry of mutual exposition carried the two men into the chartroom, where Coldbrace observed with displeasure the flat form of his captain. Nord's usually muscle-tuned body resembled a wet pretzel.

"I wonder what McGuire socked him with. Must have been a close relative to a crowbar."

"Monkey wrench, sir, under table."

"A monkey wrench!"

"Think so, too, sir. Same divination. Gentleman stowaway maybe wreak havoc with engines."

"Yes, that's where he would have got it all right — probably where he hid out, too."

Coldbrace went over to the shining wheel and panel of pushbuttons. A glance at the compass showed him that *Sargasso II* was barreling along in the general direction of the Canary Islands, with the coast of Africa hospitably open-armed if she missed them.

He spun the wheel and set the course for Pimento Atoll. Coldbrace then, pressing the proper pushbuttons, put *Sargasso II* through her various paces. She responded beautifully, just like the dreamboat she was.

"Evidently McGuire didn't have time," he said.

"Right, sir. Captain act too quick."

"Wonder what he used."

"Fist, sir."

"Of course. Simultaneous blows. You saw it?"

"Ringside. I carry pot of coffee in to Captain. Plenty of confusion. Pot of coffee drop. I swab up mess, then fetch stowaway to you."

Ah, Coldbrace reflected, the force of habit! Naturally Narciso's first reaction would have been to restore the chartroom floor to its perfect neatness.

"It's a wonder you didn't stop to wax it."

"Plan to do so, sir, first thing."

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"Well, control the impulse for a moment and bring a pot of coffee in to me."

Alone in the chartroom, except for the still recumbent captain, and with the pale binnacle light casting his features into theatrical shadows, Coldbrace weighed the alternate choices of tossing McGuire's and Miss Fitzhutt's bodies into the sea or reserving the interment for the sinkhole that always had offered such a convenient repository on the atoll.

He had a habit of congratulating himself on his unique brilliance. His technique of employing Liz the Fleece in lieu of the more commonplace ransom notes made it unnecessary to keep his victims above ground for the always messy process of forcing them to write the notes to their several mamas or papas. There was no danger to Liz in this because of the guavalike fear instilled in the parents over the safety of their offspring.

A glance at the ship's clock informed him that the hour approached six bells or, from Fitzhutt's and Liz the Fleece's landside measurement of time, ten minutes before three. He wondered at what point in her schedule Liz had arrived.

She had arrived in the Florida room of the Fitzhutt's on Palm Island.

"So you see, Colonel," Liz was saying, sipping a Scotch highball, "we hold your daughter in the hollow of our hand."

Fitzhutt, using Liz's curves as an abacus, counted ten.

"I am not entirely displeased. On the other hand, Miss Fleece, my city editor, a Mr. McGuire, was idiot enough to tail my daughter on this geiger-counter mining expedition. He has a trap-sharp mind which evidently has become unhinged owing to an incomprehensible affection for Violet. It appears that he has vanished, too. A pity. His services are valuable to my paper."

The McGuire angle was news to Liz.

"I wouldn't count on him for any Dick Tracy, Colonel. Not unless he's a shark wrestler."

"Ah, so you have them at sea."

"Well, they're not registered at the Roney Plaza. Now is everything quite clear, Colonel? Your daughter's life depends upon your following our instructions to a dotted i."

"Omit, please, the crossed t. Clichés make me ill."

Liz finished her highball and stood up.

"I trust you will have the money at the designated rendezvous at midnight."

"Why wait until then? Why not now?"

Liz hesitated in adjusting a glove.

"Tricks affect me much in the same way that clichés affect you, Colonel. Even Hetty Green wouldn't have kept three hundred thousand in cash on hand."

"Of course she wouldn't. She wouldn't have kept ten cents."

"Well, then?"

"I've someone I'd like you to

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meet." Fitzhutt raised his voice from muted-bellow pitch to a roar. "Come in, Vickers."

A portly gentleman wearing a dinner coat stepped through the archway of the Florida room. He was flanked by two cast-iron characters in uniform.

"Miss Fleece, let me present the Commissioner of the Miami Beach Police."

Being unfamiliar with Fitzhutt's impulsive system at the game of poker, it never occurred to Coldbrace for a minute that any such scene as the one occurring in the Florida room could be taking place. He sipped the coffee that Narciso handed him.

"Any sounds from the cabin?"

"No sound. I listen with ear pressed against panel of door."

"Weren't they even talking?"

"Whisper, maybe. Hear nothing."

"Possibly McGuire is still out."

"Good reason to be so. Captain's fist very proper baked ham. Glacéd in steel."

"Well, his head isn't. Douse a bucket of water on him, Narciso."

"Get floor all wet, sir! Slap face instead?"

"Not if you propose to keep alive. Get the bucket."

"Yes, sir."

A brief space later Captain Nord, greatly refreshed by the cool sea water, sat up, stood up, then sat down on a settee.

"Dirty weather, Mr. Coldbrace. I never knew them to break into the chartroom before. How's the glass?"

"Twenty-nine point seven."

"I'd have sworn she'd be lower than that. What happened?"

"A Mr. McGuire hit you on the head with a monkey wrench."

"That's right — it all comes back to me now. When?"

"Around fifteen minutes ago."

"Where is he? I recall connecting with his jaw."

"You did. He is locked in the cabin with Miss Fitzhutt. What else do you recollect?"

"Well, I was naturally astonished at seeing a stranger aboard in the middle of the Gulf Stream with a monkey wrench in his hand."

"I can understand throughly how you would be."

"Then — let me see now. Oh, yes, he raised the monkey wrench and swung. I ducked and caught a sideswipe that confused me for a moment."

"So you didn't hit him right away?"

"I did not. Not until I came to and got back on my feet."

"How long were you out?"

"I don't know. He was swinging the wrench again when I nailed him. Narciso had just come in with my coffee."

Narciso paused in his mopping.

"I drop the pot. Just as wrench descends and Captain is nailed up, too. I refer you to egg."

"Take the wheel, Captain. Hold her as she is. I'll relieve you for a

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spell after I've taken care of that job in the cabin. I have decided to do it here."

"I help, sir?"

"Thank you, Narciso. No."

Coldbrace went to his own quarters and selected a .32 caliber revolver from his assortment of guns. He loaded it. He was an excellent shot and, of course, within the cabin's close range could not possibly miss hitting vital spots in the anatomies of McGuire (who is all probability would still be a sitting duck) and of Miss Fitzhutt.

All set for good hunting, he went to the cabin door and quietly turned the key and twisted the knob. The door, to his bemusement, failed to open. Coldbrace realized that the knob must be lashed to something on the other side — possibly to one of the table legs which were screwed fast onto the decking.

He rapped politely and called, "Miss Fitzhutt?"

Violet's voice was decidedly frostbitten. "Well?"

"What on earth did you find in there to lash the door with?"

"My slip happens to be 100 per cent pure nylon, than which the tensile strength —"

"Yes, yes, I know. A suitable hawser for the *Queen Mary*."

"And what is more, you poisonous old goat, McGuire knows his knots. He was a water boy, or something, on the *Arizona*."

"Splendid. Then I take it he has come to?"

"As much as he ever has been. Ouch!"

"A pinch, Miss Fitzhutt?"

"No. A kick on the shin."

"Might I ask what you hope to gain by this barricade? Naturally we have fire axes on board."

"Use them. Go ahead and make a hole — if you want your wrist smashed by the butt of this automatic when you poke it through the door."

"I could shoot you through it, Miss Fitzhutt."

"With our lights out?"

"You have a point there."

"Why shoot us anyhow? Have you got wise — *ouch!*"

Coldbrace's voice went in the deep freeze.

"Wise? Wise to what, Miss Fitzhutt?"

"You," said the voice of McGuire, "go chase a herring."

Coldbrace ignored further chitchat. He was both puzzled and disturbed. He returned to the chartroom. Narciso, by now, was buffing fresh wax.

"Captain, I want you to think hard. I've an impression that something has gone sour."

"What could have? In spite of that monkey wrench from the tool chest the motors are perfect. I cannot say the same thing about my head."

"Can you remember nothing at all of the moment when you were simply stunned? Before you knocked each other out?"

"If you skip a star or two, not a thing."

"Narciso —"

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"Sir? Floor look peachy swell again?"

"Its patina is superb." Coldbrace was feeling no alarm in the sense of an imminent disaster such as a time bomb, for example, that would go off and reduce *Sargasso II* to toothpicks. Even city editors, he felt, could rarely lay their hands on an infernal machine at a moment's notice. "No, what I am looking for is something subtle."

"There is nothing subtle about that Irish heavyweight," Nord said. "That I assure you."

"Narciso, tell me exactly what was happening when you brought the coffee."

"The pot, sir, was —"

"Cut the pot. I mean McGuire. Describe precisely the pose that he was in — where he was standing — things like that."

Narciso languished into concentration.

"I reflect. I see perfect picture now. The gentleman stand there, where the captain is. His left hand reposes on binnacle. In his right hand is the monkey wrench. He observes the Captain arising onto his feet. Great curiosity expressed by both parties. He lifts wrench. Captain lifts fist. Twin projectiles hit target. Total collapse."

Coldbrace mulled this over and reached exactly no place. The hour was well on towards daybreak and the overcast was lifting in the skies. *Something* was wrong — he was sure of it. But what? Something that lay in that interval between the glancing blow that had stunned Nord and the indeterminate moment later when they had gone in for their closing duet . . .

A petrified gasp from Nord put an end to this musing.

"Mr. Coldbrace, that bump on my head is worse than I thought. I have gone insane."

"Really? Why?"

Nord pointed an incredulous finger off to starboard.

"There — look at it — *sunup!*"

"All right, don't get excited. I see it. Very nice."

"Nice!" Nord shrieked. "Nice, he calls it, for the sun to rise in the west!" His finger jabbed to port. "It should be rising over there."

"Impossible! You're off your course — one hundred and eighty degrees off."

"I am not. Look at the needle."

Coldbrace looked. For the first time in his well-poised life he turned grayish green — something between an olive and a plum.

"Good God, the compass has gone haywire! We've turned around. We're heading straight back for Miami." He opened the binnacle. "What's this silver pencil doing on the compass bowl? It seems to be stuck there."

A blazing light dawned. So that's what McGuire had been up to! The pencil undoubtedly was a permanent magnet. He yanked the pencil whereupon the card indignantly swung around to N.W.b.N. along *Sargasso*

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II's present course, which did indeed point straight to Miami.

"Swing her, Captain," Coldbrace said viciously. "Head her East — full speed straight out to sea."

The flounce of *Sargasso II* as Nord swung her dead to East and gave her full speed left McGuire with his back against the ropes (née nylon slip) and Violet with both arms clamped around his neck.

"Just like in real life," she murmured, "dear."

McGuire regained his balance and, after a shove of Violet's wrists, his physical insularity.

"Coldbrace has caught on," he said. "Must have spotted the sunrise."

"And also my little birthday gift with which you upset the compass. You have no idea how thrilled I was to know you carried the pencil with you."

"Did you expect me to leave the fool thing lying loose on the desk for everybody to smirk at?"

The old Fitzhutt look came into Violet's eyes.

"You won't feel that after we get married."

"We are not going to get married. We are going to be served as an entrée by Coldbrace to a couple of sharks."

"You'll feel better when you've had your coffee."

"A fat chance of coffee — watch it, Vi!"

They eyed the turning handle of the door, the yield of the door and the slight give of its nylon lashing under the strain of a hard pull. McGuire picked up the automatic and held it by its barrel. Violet lifted an emergency oil lamp from its gimbals and pressed a pushbutton. The cabin failed to plunge into darkness because of the rising sun through its portholes.

They stood close together, flattened against the bulkhead alongside the straining door, holding the futile little weapons that were the only anchorage mooring them to life. *Sargasso II* tore on, lifting and bowing to the chop while an occasional cresting wave sent a thud of water over the stem, the sheet spume cracking like whips along the cabin roof.

"That slip of mine seems to be giving a little," Violet said through whitening lips. "Do you think I ought to take it back to Burdine's?"

With his free hand McGuire grasped Violet's free hand.

"I want you to know," he said in the smoky tones of good, bonded Irish whiskey, "that if anything should happen to us, like mincemeat, I really might have made an honest woman of you, Violet."

McGuire, having obviously gone straight off his nut, swayed to kiss her. It was a tender moment, one long to be cherished down through the twilight of their years should there be any. Its fragile charm was shattered by a sheet of water across the bows that surely had not originated in a wave. This almost instantly was followed by a detonating crash.

"Guadalcanal?" Violet suggested.

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"No. Coast Guard! A shot across the bows."

Sargasso II heeled to a stop, hurtling Violet and McGuire onto a pale leather-covered bench.

"Next to being proposed to in a popcorn shaker —" Violet said, rearranging her limbs.

"You can forget that now. Just consider me as having been delirious."

"The Fitzhutts," Violet said firmly, "have elephant blood."

Sargasso II wallowed for a moment, broadside to the waves, then a gray hull blocked the portholes, giving a couple of grinds and bumps as multiple feet came plunking down on board.

Shortly a familiar voice came through the wood panels and into the cabin.

"What's the matter with this door? It won't open."

"My slip, Papa," Violet shouted.

"What about your slip?"

"It's tied in knots. McGuire made them and they won't open."

"McGuire tied your slip in knots? I don't believe it."

A strange voice said, "Open a porthole, Miss, and we'll pass you in a knife."

Violet did and was briefly faced by a coastguardman's hand and a wrist, tastefully tattooed with a young lady wrapped in a snake. The hand presented Violet with a knife.

As soon as the door was opened, Fitzhutt rushed directly to McGuire.

"Thank God, McGuire, you're safe!"

"If you mean that my life has been spared, sir, yes. Otherwise I wouldn't know."

"Good morning, Papa."

"Ah, yes — Violet. Good morning, my dear. I want you to meet Lieutenant Gates of the Coast Guard. A Miss Elizabeth Fleece gave us a description of this floating kidnapers' delight, and one of the squadron of planes I persuaded them to send out from Opa-Locka spotted it and directed us to you. After Coldbrace and his two henchmen are turned over to the shore authorities, Lieutenant Gates is joining us at breakfast."

Later in the morning, in the city editor's office of the *Miami Press*, Violet said, "You can assign Schmitt or Wallace or Mairzie Doats or anybody you like to write the story, but *I'm* going to do my own feature version of it; and furthermore, McGuire, it will go to press without your okay — in fact, even without your seeing the copy."

"Violet, I am a very tired man. I am too weak to argue with you. Your masterpiece will undoubtedly embrace the quintessences of Jack London, Joseph Conrad, Laura Jean Libbey, and Nick Carter — and I don't give one good damn. I am only grateful that I discovered your true nature before we got serious. Life with you would be a vistascope production of the Battle of the Bulge."

Violet left McGuire without — astonishingly — saying a single word. She preempted an idle typewriter, sat

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down, inserted paper, and began to compose.

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